



60c
60-2140

The powerful novel that became a brilliant
prize-winning International Classics motion picture

Rapture

By PHYLLIS HASTINGS

(Original title: Rapture In My Rags)



A young, lonely girl...a lost young man...
a house on a deserted beach...this was the beginning...

From Coast to Coast—Critics Praise

RAPTURE

BOSTON HERALD: "Dramatic . . . reaches the heights of pathos, understanding and humanity . . . its drive and power will capture you completely"

LOS ANGELES TIMES: "Unusually fine . . . a story of fear and violence, dramatic . . . original in concept . . . effective"

COLUMBUS DISPATCH: "Amazing . . . brilliant . . . completely enthralling . . . unique"

CHATTANOOGA TIMES: "One of those rare novels that has everything . . . excellent . . . superb . . . unusually effective"

FORT WORTH STAR-TELEGRAM: "A rare experience for the reader"

Rapture

By PHYLLIS HASTINGS

Original title: *Rapture In My Rags*

Some rapture in my rags awakes;
I lift void eyes and scan
The skies for crows, those ravening foes
Of my strange master, Man.

Walter de la Mare
The Scarecrow

POPULAR LIBRARY • NEW YORK

All POPULAR LIBRARY books are carefully selected by the POPULAR LIBRARY Editorial Board and represent titles by the world's greatest authors.

POPULAR LIBRARY EDITION

Copyright, 1954, by E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc.

Published by arrangement with J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.

Original title: *Rapture in My Rags*

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
All rights reserved.

CHAPTER 1

Some people are afraid of mice, some of burglars, some of ghosts. Some even fear without knowing what they fear. But I am no longer afraid, though I am alone in the farmhouse, and outside is blowing a sou'westerly gale. Usually we can hear the sea, although it is away beyond the fields, but tonight the wind and the sea are mingled, shrieking one against the other.

In the kitchen are good, companionable sounds—the clock ticking, the flames licking round the logs, the creaking of the furniture. But the smallest sound of all, the traveling of my pen on the paper, is the one which fills my ears. It is long since I had the desire to write things down. When I was a child I did it, but they laughed at me, because the things I wrote were not the things which made sense to them. Now it does not matter, for by the time strange eyes look at this, I shall not be here.

I know exactly what I shall do. I shall go out into the storm, through the yard and down the track which leads to the lane. I shall cross the lane, open the gate and take the sunken path which runs between the cornfields, the path they say was old and well-trodden when the Romans came. It does not lead anywhere except on to the cliff, the high, unfenced chalk cliff which is England's wall. The wind will be strong there, and the night has no stars or moon, so perhaps I shall not know when the ground falls away from my feet. Perhaps it will seem no more than one of my bad dreams, with the wind beating on my head and the waves leaping up to meet me.

But truly I am not afraid, even if it is a sin. Right and

wrong are words which get muddled in my mind, so that sometimes the one wears the face of the other. I only know that everything finishes here. It is a wall I cannot climb, without foothold or handhold. It is the last season, as though the circle of the year had uncoiled, and left me with the loose end of a winter everlasting. Oh, how long it is since spring!

I was sitting here in the kitchen, I remember, and the lamp was lit. I said to my father, "I will make you a scarecrow." I don't know what made me say it. Perhaps it was seeing the birds that afternoon, black and hungry, diving on the rows of newly planted corn. Or perhaps it is that I like scarecrows and am sorry for them. At school they called me Scarecrow. I was long and awkward, with large bones, and my clothes never covered my wrists or my knees. They all called me that, the boys and the girls, and they laughed. I kept my face stiff, as if I did not care, but a coldness and a fear used to come upon me. I would make myself as small as I could, wishing I had quills like a hedgehog, and I would close my ears against what was being taught me, so that I should not be able to answer any questions. I wanted not to be noticed. I wanted to be as small as an ant. I would have wanted to die, but for the awful advertisement of a headstone. That was when I first felt sorry for scarecrows. To be so alone and so distinct, with the birds looking sideways at you and wondering—oh, that was a dreadful thing!

So I said to my father, "I will make you a scarecrow."

He pulled hard on his pipe and did not speak for five minutes. That was his way. Strangers thought he had not heard, and they repeated their questions, which made him very angry, but I knew that he was thinking. A question, he used to say, is a serious thing, and cannot be answered lightly. It must be viewed from all angles, and the impossible replies swept aside, and then the others must be weighed and considered. There have been many tragedies, he said, on account of questions being answered before they are so much as properly asked.

So I waited, while he thought about my offer, and presently he inquired, "What with?"

I was ready, for I had it all sorted out in my mind. "Your black suit."

He puffed furiously at his pipe, and I could see he was

wondering whether to be angry or whether to be reasonable about it. My father was terrible when he was angry. It was like having the whole of the Old Testament poured on your head.

After five minutes he had not made up his mind, so, to gain time, he said, "That suit. I married your mother in it. I buried her in it, too."

"Yes, Father. But the trousers will not button over your stomach, and the waistcoat will not button over your chest, and the coat will not button over the rest of the suit."

His eyes flashed fire, and I feared he had an anger coming on. "It is well known, girl, that cloth shrinks with age. I am not the only man in the world. Others could wear it."

"Yes, Father. But moths have eaten it."

"Who has been caring for it?" he thundered.

"I have, Father. I have brushed it and shaken it regularly."

"Then how have the moths got in?"

"I—don't know, Father. It must have been when I was not looking."

My father took his pipe out of his mouth, and banged his fist on the kitchen table. It is a large and solid table, and I keep it scrubbed as white as bleached linen. If I hit it, I should only hurt my hand, but when my father banged with his fist, the table seemed to leap from the stones of the floor. "You should be thrashed. If you were younger, and if your mother was alive for me to ask her advice, I should thrash you. No daughter of mine is safe from a thrashing."

"No, Father."

Having established his authority, he quietened a little. "No matter. What of a few moth holes? Are all men so proud and so rich that they must wear suits without holes? Give it away."

"But, Father, the holes in the trousers are in one place, between the legs. It is not decent. Even Old Wegg has refused the suit."

"He's getting spoilt," growled my father, "I have heard that they have only to go and ask for a bed, and they get one. What is more, the bed jumps up and down on springs like a jack-in-the-box, and it has no fleas. Tramps have no self-respect these days. No wonder Wegg can turn up his nose at a good suit that has never been fouled with sweat!

Unless, perhaps, on my wedding day. I was sweating then."

Old Wegg is a disreputable character who has tramped our district for as long as I can remember. He has a sweeping beard, and his hair has not been cut for twenty years. There was a tale that his wife had run away from him, and he had vowed never to cut his hair until he found her. I don't know whether it is true. If you asked Old Wegg, he would not answer yes or no to it, for he is a man of few words. He plods along the roads and lanes, pushing an old perambulator which has one odd wheel, so that it has a lurching and drunken movement. Into this he piles all his worldly belongings. I suppose they have a value for him, but to me they look like nothing more than a bundle of dirty rags. Apart from these he has nothing but a frying pan which hangs down the front of the pram, from the hood, like a talisman or a figurehead. If Old Wegg refused something, you could be sure it wouldn't be much use to anyone else. What he actually said was, holding the trousers up contemptuously, and poking a grubby finger at them, "Them? Why, before I could get my feet into 'em, my arse 'ud be out t'other side."

"What can I do with the suit, then?" I asked my father.

"There's only one thing," he said, with the air of a statesman solving whatever problem it is that statesmen have to solve. "You must make it into a scarecrow."

And so my scarecrow was born. But not in an hour or two. It took several days, and it took long nights, of thinking and planning, away up in my room, which is in the eaves, and is a relic from the days when the farmhouse was crowded, and when a girl who fancied a room alone must make do with what offered.

My mother did not laugh at my fancies. I think she was the only person in the world who was ever kind to me. I don't mean that the others were unkind, not all of them, but they were too busy being kind to themselves to spare a thought for those that were in great need of kindness. My mother was busy, too, Lord knows! She had eight children, and the farmhands to cook for, and the poultry to see about, and all the other dozens of duties a farmer puts on his wife as easily as some men put diamond rings on theirs. But she still found time to be kind to me. I was the eldest, and I think she was sorry for me, knowing, from the moment she saw I was a girl, that I should have to carry much

of the burden of her children that were then unborn. A "little mother" they say of the eldest girl, praising her, not understanding that there cannot be a little mother, that an unripe mother is no better than unripe fruit, that a child who tries to be a mother to other children becomes warped, misshapen, stunted, not in her body, but in the secret, hidden parts of her womanhood. I was sick of birth and child-rearing before I was ten years old.

I was fourteen when I asked for a bedroom of my own. My sisters and brothers laughed at me. They were content to huddle, once the sexes were separated, like little mice in a nest. But I wanted space in which to be myself. Amongst the horde of my own flesh and blood I was a dry sponge. In solitude a kind of dew would fall on me, and I would swell up and be great and wise. My mother gave me the little room nobody wanted. It is an attic, really, with a dormer window. Its walls are odd shapes, and its floor is uneven, but it is as real as a person. It welcomes me and takes me in its arms. During the day it is deliciously warm. The sun shines in it with a peculiar intensity, and brings out lovely smells from the wood, the smells of ripe apples, and box, and lavender, and old age, and bees. At night it is mysterious. The moon chooses to look through the window, as into a mirror, and the stars are much nearer to my bedroom than to any other room in the house.

To this place, then, I took my father's black suit, and conceived a scarecrow. Oh, you may say it is easy. You may be thinking of scarecrows which are no more than an empty coat and hat. A stake is driven into the ground, and a hat perched on top of it. Then a crosspiece is nailed to the stake, and the coat is hung on that. Has it ever occurred to you that these scarecrows are made from a cross, like that on which Our Lord was crucified? There is more than coincidence in this. It is a reminder that every joy has its price, so that a scarecrow must be crucified before the corn can grow.

But my scarecrow was no makeshift. He was to be fashioned proudly, as a man is fashioned, and beneath my father's wedding suit should be more than empty air. From Mr. Creeting, the carpenter, I begged sawdust, and stuffed it into long pipes I had made from pieces of old rag. Those were his legs, and for his arms I did likewise. I dared not form his body of sawdust and cloth, for fear it might burst,

but in a dark corner of the barn I found a small old barrel, left and forgotten from the days when my father had kept a firkin of ale in the house, and when there had been gaiety and the sound of laughter. That barrel made a fine trunk for the scarecrow, though I could have wished it larger round the chest and smaller round the middle. Still, he had substance, and I was excited when I saw him growing before my eyes.

It was easy to find a pair of boots in an outhouse. Continually I was coming across discarded objects my brothers had left behind. But to find gloves was not easy at all. Never have I seen a man of my family with his hands covered. Yet gloves I must have, because that was the only way my scarecrow could have hands, and without them he had a strange, mutilated look which frightened me. In the end I bought them. That was a dreadful and dangerous thing to do, because it meant lying to my father, but I had to have them. I told him I wanted to go to town to buy food. He was suspicious, of course. Once a month he gave me money for shopping, and I walked to the crossroads which are two miles away, and where, every Wednesday, there is a bus which goes to the main road from which one can catch many buses to town. Through the four weeks I look forward to that day, yet always, when it comes, I am afraid. I cannot help it, but I am afraid of the noise and the cars, and most of all of the people. There are so many of them, and sometimes they stare at me. I hate them to do this. When eyes rest on me it is as if they burn holes in my skin. But I was not afraid when I thought about buying the gloves. I wanted them so much.

"Ten days till shopping," said my father.

"Yes." I was nervous, and my fingers would not keep still. "But we have no salt."

He went to look. I had known he would, and had taken care to bury it among the vegetables.

"What d'you do with it?" he shouted.

"We must have eaten more than usual. Perhaps I put too much in the cooking."

"Useless baggage!" he snarled. "Why out of all my children do I have to be left with you?"

He often asked that question, but I did not reply, because I did not know the answer any more than he did. Things hap-

pen to us, that is all, and to prevent them is like trying to hold back the rain.

"D'you think I do nothing but slave to buy salt for you?" he went on. "Haven't you even the sense to be thrifty? Why, my cattle have more brains than you."

"We—we can do without," I stammered, frightened now, so that I would rather wait for the gloves than have any more of his anger on me.

"What!" he yelled. "Eat eggs without salt? Don't you know that's a heathen thing to do? No, my lazy wench, you'll not get out of it that way. You'll go to town this very day, and there's no bus at the crossroads, so you'll walk to the main road, and may it take some of the fat off your idle, good-for-nothing bones!"

There was little enough flesh on my bones, and scarcely a curve to make a woman of me, but I did not mind what he said. I was only too glad he would let me go, and the walk, which was six miles each way, counted as nothing.

In order to have money for my use, I was compelled to deceive him, but that was not so difficult, because I had all the groceries to buy, and tobacco for him, and medicine from the chemist for his cough, and wool for knitting his socks. He had decided, when he did make up his mind for me to go, that I should buy a month's supplies, to save wasting time and money on another journey Wednesday week. So I cheated him, adding a penny here and a penny there. He grumbled at the price of things, as he always did, but he could not prove anything, for he never went to the shops himself, his trips to town being only for the market.

The gloves I bought were white cotton ones. They looked very smart, and when I had stuffed the fingers—not too tightly, for that made them like sausages—and sewn the gloves to the cuffs of the coat, they were amazingly real.

Now I had finished everything but the head, and that had me almost in despair. Father supplied a battered old hat willingly enough, for he knew, as everybody does, that a scarecrow must have a hat, but what about the face? I tried to make features on a piece of cloth. I tried with a pen, and with boot blackening, and with the few dyes and vegetable colorings I could find or concoct. But it was hopeless. I was no artist, and what I did was an insult to the

creature I had created, for I gave him either a wicked leer, or a drooling, imbecile expression. Better, I thought, an imaginary face than one which is evil. So I found a pumpkin, a smallish one from the autumn, a bit shriveled, but no matter. Round this I tied a piece of black material where the face should be, and pulled the hat well down. Then I propped him up against the head of my bed, and I looked at him. I pulled back the curtains and blew out the candle, and there he was, in the pearly black darkness of a spring night. As I sat there, beside the window, staring at him, his shape became clearer. He was standing a little stoopingly, as if thoughtful, his face shadowed, and I seemed to see his face more plainly than if it had existed.

He was so like a real man that I was too shy to undress. But I was not afraid. How could I be afraid, when I had known him before he was born? I was excited, though. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. I was alone in my room, yet not alone. There was a man with me, yet not a man. It was like one's dreams coming true, or so nearly true that it was hard to tell whether they had or had not.

All that night I crouched on the hard little window seat, and when dawn began to show, and I got up, stiff and cold, it was as if I had passed through an immaterial but somehow satisfying wedding night.

CHAPTER 2

After three days my father asked, "What about that scarecrow you were going to make?"

I didn't know how to answer. I didn't dare tell him that now I had finished the scarecrow I could not bear to let him go to the fields. Yet if I denied having made it, he would inquire after his suit and his hat. So, having no reply ready, I was silent.

"D'you hear me?" he roared. "What's the matter with you? Lost your tongue? I declare, you get sillier in the head every day."

I had not lost my tongue, but I knew I had lost my com-

panion, lost something which had become a someone. It wasn't that I really believed him to be alive. I had more sense than that. It was simply that I could pretend he was alive, and by trying to deceive myself could almost succeed in deceiving myself, and those few moments when the deception—or the transformation, if you like—almost took place, were sheer rapture.

Through my childhood I had had no toys. My father had neither the money nor the inclination to give them to me, and my mother—poor soul!—moved in a haze of farmyard labor and childbirth labor. So my scarecrow represented all the toys I had missed, and, because I was grown up, was endowed with the potency of an adult imagination. But my mother had given me the key to a world which brought rich food to my starved fancy. She had some books which had belonged to her brother, a promising boy who had died young as the result of an accident, and she gave me access to these books as soon as I could read. They were few enough—less than two dozen—but to me they were the richest library in the world. They were mostly poetry and romance, with one or two quaint old records of travel. I devoured them hungrily, and then, my first pangs satisfied, nibbled at them a thousand times. They were my schoolteacher, my priest, my parents, my friends, my lover. They taught me to understand words, and to be able to use them. There was no one with whom I could discuss or share my books. My brothers and sisters were known as “normal,” which means that they were healthy young animals with no great knowledge, and with just enough ambition to do a job well enough to earn sufficient money for the filling of their stomachs and the covering of their bodies.

Perhaps in my loneliness those books became a greater part of me than they would otherwise have done. I was neither praised nor condemned for my studies, which were looked upon as merely further evidence of my queerness.

My sisters had surrounded themselves with as many playthings as their means would allow, and sometimes more, and because these playthings were of the type conventionally approved, they were aided and abetted in their cupidity by my parents and, later, by their husbands. When they were young they wanted bracelets for their arms and ribbons for their hair. Now they were older, and married,

it was cars and washing machines and television sets. But the desire for these was held to be a proper and virtuous one, so their husbands slaved, and my sisters preened themselves.

I had never wanted such things. My desires were always foolish. I longed for a bird's wings, and the wind's feet, and the sea's laughter, and sometimes I longed for arms to hold me tightly against the awful mystery of life, but the arms I longed for were never the arms of the local farmers' sons, and my desires were too intangible ever to blossom or come to fruit.

Now at last I had something of my own. I had my scarecrow with whom to share my books and the thoughts which went on inside my head. And my father was going to take him away from me. He was going to put him outside in the cold fields, where the ground was still soggy with early spring, where the rain would drench his black suit until it sagged shapelessly, where the sawdust of his limbs would grow heavy with damp, until he became bowed like an old man, where the white gloves would grime and rot, where he would be no more than a policeman to a flock of stupid birds.

I could have killed my father then. It was not because he was an ignorant old man that I hated him, but because he was a heartless old man. "They know not what they do," may be reason for forgiveness. But, "They care not what they do," is no reason. Never in all my life had my father inquired as to my feelings about anything. Whether I felt pleasure or pain appeared to be no concern of his. So I looked down at the floor, in case he should see the hate in my eyes.

"Well?" he barked. "What about the scarecrow?"

"It is—almost finished, Father."

"High time, too. Let me have it tomorrow morning."

There was another quandary, for if I gave it to him, he would feel how heavy and solid it was, and he would find the barrel, and would suddenly discover some use to which he might put it. He disliked things being wasted unless he himself wasted them. He would laugh, but with no merriment, at the care I had taken, and would probably tear my scarecrow asunder in front of me, and would crucify the empty suit. That, I knew, was more than I could bear. I could resign myself to losing him. People who have never

had anything are used to losses. But to see him disintegrate, to see him go back to precreation, that was different.

There was only one solution. I went to bed and slept heavily, having been awake all the night before. Yet even in my sleep I seemed to be aware of the figure standing beside me. I would have laid him on the bed with me, but I was afraid my father might discover us. It is rare indeed for my father to come to my room, yet when we have reason to fear a thing it is then that fate chooses to send it.

I had set my alarm clock to ring before dawn, and I got up and dressed, put the scarecrow over my shoulder, and quietly left the house. He was heavy, but I am strong, and the urgent necessity of what I did lent me greater strength. I, and only I, must set him up in the field, and must pray that my father, seeing the business accomplished, would trouble himself no further about it.

It was lonely in the fields. For days a dry wind had blown from the east making the soil hard and gray and brittle. The quickthorn was already green-tipped, but now it looked of a uniform blackness. A few sleepy chirps showed that some of the birds were trying to find enough energy to wake up and face another day's hard food-hunting. In the distance was the sea, but it said nothing. It is always silent when the east wind blows.

I tied my scarecrow firmly against the fence, and put an acorn in his pocket for luck. Then I said good-by. I looked round first, though I knew no one would be watching in that place and at that time. We were quite alone. So I kissed him. Twice I walked away, and twice I ran back, just to stroke the sleeves of his coat and feel the comfort of it.

But time will not be stopped. Day was bringing the color back into things, and I had to go. Draggingly I took myself down the hard, unfriendly furrow at the side of that field, which my father had ploughed so relentlessly that there was no room for the grass to grow. I looked back several times, and the further I got from my scarecrow, the more real he looked. I could almost imagine that his head moved, and that he was gazing after me.

At last I passed out of sight, and hurried, knowing my father would wonder where I was, and why I had not started on my many duties. But as I half ran, there was a physical pain in me, as though I had torn one part of myself away, and left the other on the fence.

CHAPTER 3

The blackthorn went and the whitethorn came. The grass was growing quickly, and the corn was through and looking like coarse, sparse grass. There was plenty of work to be done on the farm at that time, but each day I managed to snatch a few minutes to visit the scarecrow. He was not looking as grand as when I took him to the field. The spring rains had been hard on his clothes, and on his sawdust-packed arms and legs. He sagged now, as though he had grown half a century older in a few weeks. Only his barrel body held its jauntiness, and beside his weakening limbs it looked somehow indecent, as if it kept itself bonny on all the fleshly lusts, while the rest of the man decayed. After wet days, when he hung there stale and sodden, I was angry and felt as if I hated him. I wanted to spit in the place where his face should be. I wanted to bang my fist into his belly, only I knew it was my fist that would suffer. He had betrayed me, I thought, by not being the man I had made him. Then my anger would pass, and I would pity him. I had known how it would be, out there in the open, but I had had no choice. So, between rage and compassion, I would return home, sad because of what I knew was happening, that we were growing apart. When he had been with me in my room, I had known him, known his every thought. Now we were separated. All day he looked upon things different from the things I looked upon. He saw different clouds, different birds, different patterns made by the wind. Even his dreams at night were strange and foreign. It was inevitable that we should become stiff and formal, that I should be shy of him, not daring to kiss him, or even to touch him. The loneliness, too, was worse, because it was the loneliness from which something had been taken away, not the loneliness into which something had never come. Even my room was bare and unfriendly as if he had robbed it. I began to wish I had not made him, yet was ashamed of wishing it, for it was like a mother wanting her born child unborn again.

One morning I had time and to spare, for it was a Sun-

day, and my father thought I was at church, as indeed I should have been before the days of the scarecrow. My father was not one for religion, but he was afraid of denying others their beliefs, for he was a superstitious man. So he allowed me to go to church, and I went, glad of the rest and the quietness, and glad to be treated politely, as people are treated when they go to worship God. Not that I went to worship Him. Mr. Plescott, our vicar, was as calm and cool as a dew pond, but I don't think his God would have much interest in me, nor I in Him. His God is respectable and historical and a great maker of rules. His God is inside the church. Mine is outside. His God is one. Mine are many. My gods are strong and cruel and unpredictable. The rules they make are by themselves broken. In the storm clouds I see their thumbs that threaten to press me flat like an unnecessary ant. In the sea tearing at the chalk cliffs I hear their voices, jeering and mocking. When the tall trees shudder and bend in agony, it is the wind of the gods' passing. Often I have seen where they have passed. Had I been quicker I should have caught sight of them, but the eyeballs are too slow. They are all around me, my gods. They ride the gales in fury, and lightning is the clapping of their hands. But sometimes, in gentle mood, they touch my cheek softly, and when I lie in the hot sun I feel their hands about the secret parts of my body. Mr. Plescott says his God is a God of Love, but there is no love in Mr. Plescott's face, only virtue. Still, it is good to sit down in church. It is even good to kneel.

That morning I was gay. The sky was having a game with the wind, making silly pictures in blue and white, then rubbing them out almost as soon as they were made. The wind played a game with me, too, tossing up my skirt and pushing me behind the knees, so that I was forced to run, but not reluctantly. It was a day for running and singing and dancing.

At the end of the farm track you come upon the road. It is a narrow road, scarcely more than a lane. Cars use it as rarely as possible, for if they meet another of their kind, one has to go back and back until it can huddle against a gate. Besides this there are the hedges, which are sharp and thorny and liable to scratch the shiny sides and tops of the cars. When people do come along that road in cars, they are worried and nervous and usually bad-tempered, because they have come by mistake, or the people with them have told them to come. I have heard angry words pouring out of the open windows.

"Well, you suggested it."

"I didn't."

"Yes, you did. You said it looked a picturesque little lane."

"So it is."

"Picturesque my foot! What d'you think it will do to the springs? Potholes like bomb craters. I don't know what use it is buying a new car, I'm sure. You treat it as if you had half-a-dozen more back home. When this is worn out we'll never be able to afford another one. You'd think you'd realize that and be careful. But not you! Up hill, down dale, bump the thing to pieces. Plenty more where this came from. If it was me asking for a fur coat—ah, that'd be different. Well, are you going to move, or are you going to wait till one of those great tractors comes and completely blocks the road? I don't know why they allow the farmers to have them. A menace, that's what they are."

"Wouldn't you like to picnic here?"

"What! Here? Don't be silly! What have we got here except hedges and a couple of fields? There's not even a view. You get along and find a decent road which goes somewhere, so that we can buy some ice cream."

When people like this saw me, they glared, as though I had no right to be there, as though they would like to run me down. They frightened me, and I would jump into the hedge, scratching my arms if they happened to be bare. Then they would laugh heartily at the primitive fools who live in this primitive land. That is why I am disturbed when I see cars.

This morning a car was there, a large, fierce-looking one. It was quiet and empty, but that did not reassure me, for on the front of it was a terrifying word. The word was "Police."

I stood holding on to the gatepost where the track led to the road, and I was quaking and trembling. It was stupid, I knew, but I could not help it. When I was at school the children had told me things about policemen. Policemen, they said, were chosen because they were cruel and ruthless, and had strange, magical powers, like ogres. If they blew their whistles straight in your face, you would turn into stone, like the ring of stones up on the Downs, stones which we called the Merry Maidens. They could throw you into prison and feed you on bread and water for ever, and not even your mother and father could get you out. Some policemen, they said, were cannibals, and liked nothing better than a new-

born baby, if they could find one. Other things they told me, disgusting, obscene, filling me with such horror that at the sight of that blue uniform I would run and run until I fell exhausted, my lungs and heart straining against the earth. I guessed, afterwards, that this was the children's way of teasing me, but I never lost my fear, and I never dared ask whether there was truth in any of their tales.

Carefully I skirted the car, keeping as far from it as possible, then ran across the lane to where, on the other side, a gated track led through the meadows to the high cornfield where my scarecrow stood.

It is a path I love, though I do not know why. Stony and straight it goes, with no hedges, but with steep banks on either side, so that it is sheltered without being shaded, and the sun pours down on it. Later in the year there is wild thyme on the banks, but on that morning of last spring they were sprinkled with violets. Someone once told me, I forget who it was, that this path had been a road belonging to the old people, those who lived on this island centuries before the Romans came. It would have been level with the fields then, this someone said, but the treading of countless human feet had caused it to sink and become hollowed out. I was happy, not sad, to think of those people, even though they were dead. It was nice to walk where they had walked, to fit my footsteps into theirs. It made me belong, even though I belonged to those who had been blown dust these thousands of years.

There is a slight rise to the cornfield, not really a hill but an incline which mounts steadily and easily, and at the top there is a bend to the left. That is why, in the hollow well of the track, I did not see the intruders until I was upon them. It was not surprising I did not hear them, for they were as silent as wild hunting animals. Indeed, they were hunting, and to me it would have been less of a shock had I walked into a tiger.

I screamed. Yes, I am sure I must have screamed, for they looked annoyed, and one said, in a surly voice, "All right! All right!" There were four policemen and they had two dogs tightly leashed. The men were alert, but the dogs had lost the scent, for they drooped their ears and looked bored.

I wanted to run. I wanted to run back down the track, up the lane, and along the farm path to the house, and up the

stairs to my bedroom. But I was paralyzed with fear, and could only lean back against the bank and press my hands to my mouth, so that no more screams would come out.

I was sure, utterly sure, that these policemen would cause something terrible to happen. They had invaded my land and, through it, the innermost privacy of my life. Always, whether they were there or not, the imprint of their figures would remain on that part of the track. They were photographed there for eternity, and they had polluted the place.

"What's the matter with her?" asked one, roughly.

Another shrugged his shoulders and tapped his head.

I tried to remember what I had done. It must be some sin of mine which had brought them here. There was no other reason for them to come. My mind darted backwards and forwards among the vague mists of the past, but all I could recollect of criminal stature was stealing some sweets from my teacher's desk. I had owned up as soon as inquiries commenced, because I had never been clever enough to know how to lie, but even so my teacher threatened to send for a policeman.

"They were meant for us, anyway," I explained, nervously.

"What was meant for you?" asked a policeman.

"The sweets. She bought them to give to us, so I should have some if I had waited, and that would have been better. They would have tasted sweet. The ones I took tasted bitter, because my mouth was dry with fear, and they gave me a pain in my stomach, because I had to swallow them quickly."

"What's she on about?" asked a policeman.

"Search me! I reckon she's a bit—say, perhaps she's seen him."

"She wouldn't know."

"Why not? She's not that bad."

"No harm in questioning her, anyways."

One of the policemen without a dog came towards me. I shrank back, but I was already as small as I could make myself. He spoke to me very slowly and distinctly, as though I was a foreign person. "Have—you—seen—a—man?"

The other policemen guffawed. "What d'you take her for? Hasn't come out of a nunnery, has she?"

The first policeman didn't like jokes. A least, he didn't like jokes about himself, and I was almost sorry for him, because

I don't like them, either. His eyes went hot and angry, and his lower lip jutted out. "Have you seen a man hereabouts?"

I shook my head.

"Ask her if she knows what a man looks like?" insisted the joking policeman.

I hated him, and I really was sorry for the one who asked questions, so I answered boldly, "Of course I do! My scarecrow looks like a man. I made him." And I pointed across the field, to where the scarecrow was drooping rather sadly.

They all laughed then, even the policeman who didn't like being joked about, so I hated them all.

"Now we're getting somewhere," said the joking policeman.

"Which way have you come?" the questioner went on.

I pointed back down the track.

"Yes, but where before that?"

"The farm."

"And where is the farm?"

I could only point down the track again, for that was where the farm was.

"Did you see a man as you came?"

I shook my head again.

"No use asking her," said a policeman holding a dog. "She wouldn't know if she had passed anybody."

"She probably didn't."

"She must have. I reckon he doubled back on his tracks, maybe across that field where the scarecrow is, and joined this path farther down."

"How could he? That wouldn't have fooled the dogs."

"Well, he's fooled the dogs somehow, hasn't he?"

"I say it's a hundred to one he went straight on. Might have found a stream and gone through that to put the dogs off."

"He couldn't move that fast. He was all in."

"Well, if he couldn't where is he? Vanished into thin air?"

"Perhaps he wasn't here at all."

"Oh? What did we see, then? Four pairs of eyes suffering from hal-lucy-nations?"

"We won't be popular when we get back, missing him like this."

"Aw, it's only temporary. We'll turn him in before night."

They were so busy talking and arguing together that they had almost forgotten me. I wanted to move, but to get into the cornfield meant going past them, and I wasn't brave

enough for that. I could have gone back, but then I should have missed my visit to the scarecrow, which I didn't want to do.

"Oh, well—"

They came towards me. The track was quite wide enough for them to pass, one at a time, but I spread out my arms and flattened myself against the bank. The bank sloped towards the top, so that my shoulders lay back and my hips were thrust forward. One of the policemen—a young-looking one—whispered something to another, and they both laughed. I did not know what they said, but from their eyes I knew that it was about me and that it was rude. I felt my face going red, and I lowered my arms and placed them over the front of me.

The oldish policeman who had questioned me stopped in front of me. "You live at the farm?"

I nodded.

"With your—husband?" He said it as though he couldn't believe it.

"My father."

"Ah! Well, tell him to keep his eyes open, will you, and let us know if he sees any strangers hanging around?"

I nodded, for the last time, and they went.

I waited until I heard them start the car and drive away. I even waited after that, listening and suspicious, even now doubtful whether the familiar peace had returned to the countryside. The birds and the insects were reassured before I was. I could tell by the sound of their voices.

At last I moved, wriggling my shoulders and rubbing the back of my neck. My whole body felt bruised, as though I had been beaten or pulled about roughly. Slowly I walked to the gate, and leaned on it, looking across the field. It was the fast-growing time of the year, and every day I could see the corn was longer and stronger. There really wasn't need of my scarecrow any more. Perhaps, I began to dream, I could take him back to my room, keep him there all summer. The thought made my heart beat faster, even though I feared it was as impossible as my other dreams. My father would ask where the scarecrow had gone. He would want the barrel. He might even think of some use for the suit and the hat. My father is clever at thinking of uses for things other people want. It was the same when we were children. He would let things be neglected in sheds and barns for years, but if we

appropriated so much as a nail or a piece of wire, he would immediately discover that for ages he had been needing nothing more desperately than that nail and that piece of wire. Still, it was pleasant to dream of how pleasant it would be were I free to possess the scarecrow.

When I dream, my eyes become filmed, and my thoughts almost force my eyes to see what I am dreaming. That is how I find such magnificent pictures in the clouds, and it is why the trees take on shapes of strange animals and of people who are not like people of this world. Sometimes those shapes frightened me, and I ran screaming to my father, who told me not to be a fool, but mostly they were beautiful and comforting, so when I saw things beginning to take on their different look, I did not often forbid my eyes to play their tricks.

That is why I was not at first disturbed by the strange happening in the cornfield. It was part of my dream, and it was fun. I laughed, and half closed my eyes, to make it seem more real. In a few minutes I would cross the field, and would examine the scarecrow to discover whether he had suffered further damage from the spring rain which had fallen softly and persistently throughout the night. Yesterday I had found a rent in one of his legs, and he had bled sawdust until on that side he looked as though he suffered from a wasting disease. This morning I had needle and cotton in my pocket, and if I could I would mend the tear. But if the material had become so rotten that it pulled away from the needle, then there would be nothing I could do.

I was anxious to get this task accomplished, yet still I lingered by the gate. That is what my father used to complain of, my idleness. I start a job but forget to finish it. There are so many things to distract me—a leaf, a stone, a gust of wind, the note of a bird. Even indoors I am hindered and intrigued by the unexpected touch of sunlight on a familiar object, or even by the crackling of the fire. So I leaned on the gate and was contented with the sun's caress, which is most satisfying in spring, when we are hungry for it. My nose tickled delightfully with the fresh and rich and spicy scents. I could have stayed there all day, but I had more sense than my father gave me credit for. I knew I must bestir myself, see to the scarecrow, and return home, where much work awaited me.

I blinked the dreams out of my eyes, and went to open the gate. That was when it happened again.

I stood with my hand reaching out for the catch. I could not stir. It was as though all of me had died except my eyes. I looked and looked. I closed my eyes to rest them, then opened them again, pleading with them to tell me the truth. It could not be, and yet it was. The scarecrow had moved!

CHAPTER 4

I did not open the gate, and I did not cross the field to the scarecrow. I was afraid. So I turned and ran all the way home. When I got back I was shaking in my arms and legs and in my body, and this trembling, which I could not control, caused me to drop the dish of potatoes I was carrying to the table for my father's dinner.

He was angry enough to hit me, because he was fond of potatoes and he didn't fancy taking them from the floor. "What's wrong with you?" he cried, and slapped me across the face with the back of his hand. "You get dafter every day, girl. You can't do a man's work, nor a woman's work properly."

"I'm sorry. I was quaking and my arms went weak."

He looked at me closely. "Not going to start having fits, are you?"

I had seen dogs in fits, and they had frightened me. It was an awful thought, an unbearable one, that I might be as they, without control, writhing and foaming upon the ground. My heart hammered at the prospect, and I shook more violently than ever. "No, Father! No! Don't let me have fits!"

"A lot I could do to stop you!"

My lips were so dry that I had to lick them before I could speak again. "When the—the collie had fits, you shot him."

"Ah!" he replied, gloomily. "And sometimes I reckon it would be kinder if they did it with humans. You've nothing in your life to sing about."

"What have *you* got to sing about, Father?"

I asked him because I wanted to know, but he took it that I was being disrespectful, and raised his arm threateningly. "None of your mouth, now! Indeed I've nothing to sing about,

with you around plaguing the life out of me. If it wasn't for you I'd have Nellie and Fred here."

Nellie is my sister, and Fred is her husband. My father had asked them many times to come and live with him. Fred hadn't much of a job, and Father fancied he'd be good on the farm, and that he could leave it to him when he died. Fred rather liked the idea, but Nellie wouldn't have it. "I'm not coming while Agnes is there," she always said.

"What's wrong with Agnes?" my father would ask.

"You know what's wrong with her. Anyway, no good comes of having two mistresses in one house."

"You shall be mistress," my father promised.

"She wouldn't let me be. She's the eldest. No, we'll have to wait until she gets married—"

They all laughed at that.

"—or until you can get rid of her some other way," Nellie finished.

So they still had not come. I think my father brooded over it, wishing for the extra help, and for a man in the house to talk to. I think he hated me because of it, and put himself against me, making up his mind that nothing I could do would be right.

"What's happened to get you in such a state?" he asked now, watching me shrewdly.

That was where I should have told him about the scarecrow moving, and about the police. I longed to tell him, because he would laugh at my fears, and then they would go away. But at the same time I was afraid to tell him. I was always afraid to tell him things, and I kept secrets from him whenever I could, hugging them to me like treasures. That was the only way I could be sure of having a mind at all. As soon as I told him things they became his, not mine, and there was a gap in my mind which felt empty and unpleasant. Usually I could find only small secrets to collect, but this was a big one, it was two big ones, and I did not intend to let it go.

There was another reason, too, for keeping it to myself, though it was an instinct, really, not a reason, because I couldn't put it clearly into words. But I connected the morning's events with danger. I didn't know why or how. I simply knew that the policemen and their dogs threatened everything I had ever desired or dreamed. The moving scarecrow was a menace, too, though I could not fathom what it was he threatened.

I replied to my father, "Nothing's happened." I tried to say it boldly and innocently, but I found myself mumbling and turning my head away.

"Done anything wrong?" he questioned me, and I knew he was thinking of the time when I burnt his shirt while ironing it, and stuffed it up the chimney of the front sitting room, where we scarcely ever have a fire, only he took it into his head to light one in honor of my brother who was home from being abroad in the army. I knew he was thinking, too, of the chamber pot I broke and hid in a sack I thought was empty, only it wasn't and he fed it to the cows one day that winter. I shook my head, glad that it was a truthful shake, for I hadn't done anything wrong.

"Met anyone?" Our farm was fairly isolated, and it was enough of an event to run into a stranger or a neighbor to make it news worth telling.

I shook my head again. This time it was not entirely true, but I assured myself it was at least half the truth. The people I had met were not *anyone*. They were a specialized group, a regiment of figures in uniform. And I had not exactly *met* them. I had been ambushed and hard put to it to make myself small enough and unimportant enough to escape.

My father asked me no more questions, but he watched me closely throughout the meal. He knew me well enough to read my expressions, and I was not clever at concealment. Guilt was an emotion which painted itself clearly upon me in my cheeks and my unsteady mouth, and my eyelids which felt too heavy to raise. I could feel the marks of guilt creeping over me now, though I commanded them silently to go away, because I had done no wrong. They would not go. They reminded me of the message the police had told me to give my father. I had forgotten what the message was, but messages were made to be given, and to keep them back was wrongdoing. Yet I did not waver in my intention. Too tell him a part would mean telling him the whole, and that I would not do.

The afternoon passed slowly, for there was much to think about, and thoughts can travel so far in a few minutes as to make three hours comparable with a century. At first I thought about the police and the scarecrow, and then I thought only of the scarecrow, for the police, though terrifying, belonged to the dull world of things which act in an ordinary and normal manner.

By evening I had condemned myself to a nerve-racking ordeal. I would go to the scarecrow. I would go right up to him and see what had caused him to move. It would, perhaps, be no more than the sagging of the water-logged limbs. But whatever it was, I had to know, and I had to know before night, to keep it out of my dreams.

The sun had set by the time I was able to get away, and when I reached the top of the track, dusk was lurking in the corners and under the trees. I hung back as I came to the place where the police had been, but it was safe, and I went on gladly through the gate, not even looking at the scarecrow until I was halfway across the field.

When I did look I found myself giving a cry of surprise and horror, for the scarecrow had disappeared! The fence which had supported him was bare. It looked strange and odd, and the expression of the whole field had changed. The loss was so sudden and devastating that I was not able to accommodate myself to it immediately, but kept on my way, as a hen will run around after its head is off. And that is how I discovered that everything was all right. I had lost nothing. The scarecrow—weakened by the weather, I presumed—lay on the ground, half in the ditch, not visible until one drew near. I shouted for joy, and ran forward. I was not afraid any more. He was on my own scarecrow, whom I had made. I flung myself on him, and found him warm and breathing.

That was when I should have been most terrified of all, but I was not. I was filled with gratitude and wonderment. My scarecrow had come to life. The sawdust-filled limbs, the barrel body, the pumpkin head, all had disappeared, had been transformed into flesh and blood. I did not know how it could have happened, but then, there are so many things I do not know. I do not know how the clouds get their shapes, nor how the leaves are fastened to the trees. I do not know who tells the birds when it is time for their migration, and I do not know why people live in towns, amid the dirt they themselves have made, when even animals seek a resting place away from their own droppings. There are many things I do not know, and many I half suspect, as though they lie in an unlighted corner of my mind. I suspect that things behave differently when we are not looking at them, things like meadows and hills and forests. Under our eyes they are prim, children being watched, but when we turn aside they are free, and who knows what tricks they get up to? Once or twice I have

almost caught them at it, have glimpsed flowers picking up their skirts ready to run, and trees beginning to shake with laughter. There wasn't anything strange, really, about my scarecrow coming to life. Life is conceived through love, and I had loved him.

Excitedly I felt him all over, to make sure every part of him had received the magic, and it had. Then I examined his face. I was most interested in that, anxious to see whether it had come up to my imaginings. It was rather a white face, thin, but with wide bones. I took off the hat in order to discover further. The hair was dark, and the eyebrows were black and rather bushy. The eyes were closed, and the lips were drawn tightly together, as if in pain or sadness. Faces without eyes are like shuttered windows, so I lifted the lid of the left one, and he awoke.

He sat up suddenly but unsteadily, and put his hand to his head. "Where are they? Have they gone?"

I clapped my hands, pleased that he could speak as well as everything else. "Oh, Scarecrow! You can talk!"

He dragged himself further back into the ditch, peering across the dimming field. "Are you sure they're not hanging around?"

"There's no one here but me. Why are you afraid?"

"I'm not afraid," he said, angrily. "Why should I be?"

"Everyone is afraid sometimes. I often am."

"Who are you?"

"I'm Agnes. I live at the farm."

"Who else with you?"

"Only my father."

He came out of the ditch, and rubbed his legs and arms. "I stood there for hours without moving. Don't know how I did it. I got cramp in the end."

"You've been standing there for weeks," I told him. "But you need not stay any longer. The corn is growing, and the birds are not interested in it any more. You can come back to my room."

"Your room?"

"Yes. But if my father sees you he will want the suit. Those were his wedding and funeral clothes."

"He can't have them," said Scarecrow, grimly, "unless he intends me to go naked. God! I'm hungry."

"I have plenty of food."

"Good girl! Fetch me some, then I can get away."

I stared at him, open-mouthed. "Away? Where?"

"Anywhere," he replied, impatiently. "How should I know?"

"You can't go away," I told him. "You belong to me."

He looked at me closely for the first time, though it was getting too dark to see properly. I caught a flash of white, and guessed he was smiling. "What gave you that idea?"

"Which idea?"

"That I belong to you."

"I made you," I said, proudly.

He stood up, but there was a weakness about him, and I had to hold him. "Where is the village?"

I pointed towards the west. "Over there."

"How far?"

"Three miles if you go to the crossroads, but two by the fields."

"Many houses round here?"

"None. There's just our farm. All this land belongs to my father."

He nodded. "Pretty isolated. Have you a telephone?"

"No."

He was silent for a few minutes, and seemed to be thinking deeply. "I'm dead beat," he said, at last, "and cold and hungry. Maybe it wouldn't hurt to stay one night. Can you put me up?"

"Put you up?"

"Yes. Give me a bed."

"Of course!" I was overjoyed that he wanted something from me. "We have a lot of beds, because once we were a lot of children." I counted rapidly. "We have four beds. Before, we had five, but my brother George took his with him when he got married."

"What's your father like?"

That was a difficult question to answer. It would take a long time to describe my father. It would, indeed, take a long time to describe any human creature, because they are made up of many parts, and their minds and their hearts have more outcrops than a tree has leaves. It was especially difficult for me to weigh up my father, because I knew so few people, and therefore could not compare him with others, nor say if he were a better man or a worse than most.

"Well?" Scarecrow demanded, sharply, as though he did not like to be kept waiting.

"I was trying to think."

"Haven't you made up your mind about him, after all these years?"

"How can you make up your mind about people? They are always changing."

"Surely you can tell me something about your own father!"

I thought of something. "Yes. He is not very kind."

"You mean he won't welcome me? He might even—perhaps I'd better be on my way."

"Oh, that would make him more angry," I assured him.

"Why?"

"He wouldn't like you to take his suit."

He made a sound which might have been a laugh if it had not been so weary. "It looks as though my fate is sealed. Lead on!"

I moved to go in front of him, but he stumbled and almost fell, so I took his arm. "You are weak from the long days and nights of rain and wind," I said. "When I put you there, you were smart, but now you are shabby."

"You seem to have taken a great deal of trouble over me."

"Oh, yes! I wanted you to be the best scarecrow there had ever been. But it wasn't trouble. I liked to do it. You see, I haven't had many things of my own."

"I haven't anything of my own now, except freedom, but that is the most important thing of all."

"You have me."

"I suppose I should say thank you. We must show our appreciation for gifts, mustn't we?"

He sounded as if he were mocking me, but he couldn't have been. How could he, when he belonged to me?

I was sorry he was tired, and offered to carry him.

He really laughed at this. "You? You may be a strong woman, but—"

"I carried you out from the farm."

"Ah, but I was not alive then."

This was the first time he had acknowledged the fact and the mystery of his change. I leaned towards him. "Tell me how you did it," I whispered.

But he wouldn't. "There are some secrets that mustn't be told."

And so we came to the farm. My father had lighted the lamp in the kitchen and put fuel on the range. He was angry because I was not there to feed him. I could tell he was

angry because I could see him through the window, standing doing nothing, with his hands behind his back. He might want to thrash me. He might even do it, because he had been itching to for a long time, and only the memory of my mother had stopped him.

I was frightened, but not so much as usual because with Scarecrow beside me I had double strength. I squeezed his arm, and it was wonderful to feel the bone and flesh and muscle, all in the right place as God had intended them to be, instead of the poor, shifting sawdust of my own creation.

Then I threw open the door and led him in. The kitchen looked bright and warm and scrubbed. I was pleased with the firm stone floor, and the white wood table, and the black range, and the pots and pans shining on the shelves. I was like a princess bringing my consort into my own country.

I faced my father with my head well up. "This," I said, proudly, "is my scarecrow."

CHAPTER 5

My father stared. He had small eyes, and when he was angry they went smaller, and hot, like sparks from a fire. But he wasn't staring at me. He was looking at Scarecrow. "Who are you?"

Scarecrow was quite calm. "She told you," he said, in an offhand way.

"I don't want any tramps round here." His eyes turned to me. "Where d'you pick him up?"

"In the field, of course, where he's been standing all these weeks. Oh, Father, isn't it wonderful? He's come to life. I never heard of such a thing happening before, did you?"

"No," he replied shortly.

"It was the spring sunshine and the rain. They bring the seeds to life, and it was not much more difficult to put breath into my scarecrow."

My father's eyes went back to Scarecrow. His lips opened but his teeth stayed clenched. "Get out!" he said.

"Certainly," Scarecrow answered, pleasantly, "I don't stay in places where I'm not wanted, and sometimes I don't stay

in places where I am wanted. There's the small question of your belongings, however."

My father seemed to notice for the first time what he was wearing. "Damn you! You've got my suit on."

"And a fine suit it was, too—once."

"Take it off!"

"Only the laws of decency prevent me from obeying you," Scarecrow said, gravely.

"Where are your own clothes?"

"I haven't any. I was—you might say—born in these." And he grinned at me as though he and I shared an amusing secret.

My father pointed a finger at him. "You're a no-good thief, and maybe worse. You dumped your own clothes and helped yourself to mine."

I could have screamed. My father was so stupid. "There were no other clothes, and there wasn't another scarecrow. He is Scarecrow."

"I'll set the police on you," my father rasped.

"You'll have a long walk in the dark to fetch them, Farmer, and by that time I'll be miles away. Is it worth it, for an old suit that a ragman would sniff at?"

My father capitulated. "All right. Keep the suit, but give me the hat."

Scarecrow laughed, took off the hat and laid it ceremoniously on the table. "There you are, but I hope your conscience smites you if I catch a cold in the head."

"Prison crop!" snarled my father.

Scarecrow looked shocked. "Oh, no! I just like it that way. Military style, you know."

"Very well. Now be off with you, and if you come hanging round my farm again I'll put the dogs on you."

I looked from one to the other. I heard what they said, but there seemed no sense in it. It was as if some hidden meaning lay beneath their words. "He can't go," I said. "He belongs to me."

My father took a step towards me, and I thought he was going to strike me. "What d'you mean, girl?"

"He is my scarecrow. I made him."

"Oh!" He went back and stood with one foot on the fender in front of the range, as though he had lost interest in the whole affair.

That made me bold, and I said, "Scarecrow is hungry. May he have some supper? And he wants a bed."

"Does he now?" My father's head came up and his chin poked out. His hair shone reddish in the lamplight, and so did the whiskers inside his ears and his nostrils. "P'raps he thinks we keep a boarding house. Have you got something that will pay for bed and breakfast?"

"Two strong arms," Scarecrow said.

"'Twill take a day's work," said my father, cunningly. "Specially if you fancy supper as well. Our food's not rich, but it's plentiful."

Scarecrow gave a small sigh at the mention of food, and I saw him swallow once or twice, as if his mouth were watering. "I'll work for it. I'm not in all that hurry to be off."

My legs started to rush me towards the larder, but I pulled them back and stood swaying, looking nervously towards my father. "Shall I get the meal?"

"What d'you think, fool? Isn't it an hour late now? What are you trying to do, starve me?"

So I hurried, and set the table with bread and butter and cold bacon and cheese and pickles. My father ate largely, as he always did, but it was nothing beside the amount Scarecrow managed to stuff away. I could not eat for watching him, and I noticed my father watching him, too, but my father was not pleased, as I was. He was figuring the hours of work which would be needed to pay for that meal.

My father never talked while he was eating, but after he had finished, he loosened his belt and belched, and then went to the jar on the mantelpiece for tobacco to fill his pipe. "Know this part of the country well?" he asked.

"Not very."

"You don't live around here, then?"

"No."

"What's your job?"

"I've done a lot of things, but you needn't fear that I can't be useful to you. I can milk, hoe, fell a tree, drive a tractor, do most of the ordinary chores. Not the technical jobs like hedging or thatching, though."

"Your hands don't look like a worker's."

Scarecrow studied his hands as if he were seeing them for the first time. "No. I've used my brain chiefly. More's the pity."

"Why d'you say that?"

"Because it doesn't do to think too much."

My father was curious, and Scarecrow was wary. They were like two strange dogs circling one another and sniffing. I knew why Scarecrow didn't want to tell about his past. It was because he hadn't any past except his dreams while he stood maturing beneath the sun and beneath the stars. But my father did not know. He thought he was an ordinary man.

As my father puffed on his pipe, the strong blue smoke curled round, and he sat there, contented, his head in a haze. It was only after a good meal and with his pipe going that he was mild tempered. But now something seemed to trouble him. He looked at the jar on the mantelpiece and he looked at Scarecrow, and at last he said, "You can't have any baccy. That wasn't in the bargain. Food only."

"Thank you," Scarecrow said, politely, "I don't smoke."

I put my hands over my mouth and laughed. Who ever heard of a scarecrow smoking?

"That was a fine meal," Scarecrow went on, "I appreciated it, Miss Agnes."

My father sat bolt upright. "Why d'you call her that?"

"It's her name, isn't it?"

"Who told you?"

"She did. Isn't it her name?"

"Yes. It is. Her mother would have it. I warned her. It's well known that girls christened Agnes always go mad."

"Oh, but that's ridiculous. It's just superstition."

"It's true."

"There's a saying that no boy christened George will ever be hanged, but a number have been. Agnes is a pretty name. It means a lamb."

"Lambs is daft creatures," said my father, sourly.

"What do you call her, then?"

"I don't call her anything. No need, with but the two of us. She knows it's her I'm talking to, 'cos there ain't nobody else. And when she's out of sight she'll come at a whistle, same as a dog."

"Even your dogs have names," Scarecrow reminded him.

"And why not? They're sensible animals. And speaking of names, what's yours?"

"You'd better call me Scarecrow, the same as your daughter does."

"It seems to me there's something funny about you, Mister."

"There's something funny about all of us, if you dig deeply enough. I'm rather tired now. Would you mind if I went to bed?"

"Can if you want to. We get up early here. But the girl hasn't put your bed ready." He looked at me and made a movement with his hands, as if he were shooing chickens. "Get on, stupid! What are you gawping at?"

I went up and prepared the room. It was the largest room but one, the room which my eldest and second brothers had used. It was a grand room, though I didn't find it as homely as mine. The wallpaper had a pattern of roses tied with blue ribbon, and there were roses on the washhand set, on the jug and the basin and the chamber pot, and even on the toothbrush holder and the soap tray. The bed was of brass, very fine, with only one knob missing, and an enormous mahogany wardrobe filled the whole of one wall. The rag mats on the floor had been made by my mother. Yes, it was a splendid room, but I didn't like it. It frightened me. When I was in there I would not raise my eyes above the level of the bed-rail, because of the text on the wall. It was a well-to-do text, framed in gold and with a lot of decorations and scrolls around it. Even the letters wore tails and headdresses. But the words were terrible. They said, "God Watcheth." It is a dreadful thing to be watched, and in that room it seemed as though every rose held an eye in its heart. I was not sure whether the text referred to that place alone, or to everywhere, but I was certain I was safe in my own room. God was not watching there. If He had been, I should have felt it. The only beings that watched were the stars, and they were so kind and pure and far away that no one could mind.

I would have put Scarecrow in another room, but the others were either short of furniture or the rain came in. So I prepared the brass bed of my eldest and second brothers. I chose the sheets carefully, not taking the sound thick ones, as you might imagine, but the fine thin ones, even though there were a few small holes in them. My mother had taught me what was best in sheets, and these were the linen ones she had brought with her when she married. Let my father lie on coarse twill. Scarecrow deserved the best.

I told him when everything was ready, and led him upstairs. "I hope you will be comfortable. It isn't like the

towns, of course. My sisters and brothers have electric light." I said this with pride, because I felt they had really got somewhere, to have so many modern improvements, but Scarecrow took it the other way. He shook his head sadly.

"That's what's the matter with the world. No soft candle-light to hide imperfections. Just a glare to beat at your brain until you go mad. My! What a vast room!"

"It's the largest. I—" I was nervous. I so wanted to please him. "I—I hope you won't mind it."

"Mind it!" He sat on the edge of the bed and sagged with weariness. "It's heaven, after what I've been through. What is there to mind?"

I let my eyes flicker towards the text, at the same time trying not to see it. "Up there."

He read it, then laughed. I was discovering that he had many laughs, yet I had not heard one which meant amusement. They were rueful laughs or scornful laughs or bitter laughs. This was a sympathetic laugh. "So you don't like being watched, either."

"No. Do you?"

"I detest it. Sometimes I think it would be nice to be the only seeing person in a blind world."

"You would be able to have everything you wanted."

"I don't want anything," he said, quickly, "except not to be looked at."

"You can always hide from people."

"That is what I hope to do."

"It is worse with God, because He never closes His eyes."

"I don't agree with you there, Agnes. I'll take a chance on God's understanding better than people do."

"So you don't mind the text?"

"No. I'll sleep well."

I went to my room and undressed, then I took down my hair and brushed and plaited it. I needed to think, but I could not think properly while there were other things to do. I knelt and said my prayers hurriedly. I did not pray expecting God to give me anything. He had given me little enough in the past, so why should He start now? I prayed because my mother taught me to, and I loved my mother. I also prayed because God might be angry if I didn't, and it was always wise to avoid His anger, where possible, just as it was wise to avoid my father's. Then I got into bed and started to think.

So much had happened that day that there was great con-

fusion in my mind. The strangest thing of all was that Scarecrow should come to life, but I did not waste time trying to fathom out the way in which he had done it. I remembered my eldest brother had said, "Science is beyond most of us. We've got to take it or leave it." I reckoned Scarecrow's birth was something to do with science, so I left it at that.

The hardest thing to recollect was the conversation he had with my father, the conversation which didn't seem to say what it meant. "You don't live round here?" "What's your job?" "I've done a lot of things." "I've used my brains chiefly." The words went round and round in my head, but I couldn't see how they applied to my scarecrow.

Then I remembered something else he had said. "Sometimes I don't stay in places where I am wanted." And I sat up in bed, trembling. What did he mean? Surely not that he would go away! Oh, surely not! If he left me now, I should die.

But that was what he had said. "Sometimes I don't stay." "Sometimes I don't stay." I fell back, rolled on my stomach, and bit deeply into the pillow. No, no! That would be too cruel. It couldn't happen to me. I had had so little. There was happiness owing to me, great slabs of it. Oh, why hadn't I loved God as well as fearing Him? Why hadn't I listened to my schoolteachers and tried to learn the things they taught me, even though they seemed stupid to me? Why hadn't I minded father and tried to act sensibly? I had said it couldn't happen to me, but I knew that it could. There was nothing too bad to happen to me. Perhaps even at this moment Scarecrow was creeping out of the house and past the barrel where the dog was chained. The dog ought to bark, but Scarecrow would know words to say to keep it quiet. He would be across the yard and through the gate and down the track, striding out towards those other parts of the country.

I sprang from my bed and stood shivering. This was something which could not be done by praying or imagining. I would have to do it for myself.

I crept down from the top story to the landing of the first floor. My father was asleep. I could hear him through the closed door, for he was like an engine which cannot stop even when it rests.

From Scarecrow's room no sound came. I could not bear that. I had to know whether he was still there. The door creaked, and I made a vow to grease all the hinges the next

day. There was a pale light in the room, not quite moonlight, because there were thin clouds over the sky, but it was enough for me to see Scarecrow asleep in bed. He was naked—to the waist, at all events—and his arms, free of the coverings, were flung carelessly, one over his head and the other at his side, so limp, so relaxed that they might have been stuffed with the sawdust I first gave them. He slept soundlessly, lying on his back, his lips together, his brows drawn into a troubled frown, as though his dreams were worrying him. I was so relieved to find him there that I wanted to kneel beside the bed, stroke his arm, rest my cheek against his head. But it was important that he should not wake.

I crept from the room, back up the stairs, and took a pillow and blanket from my bed. Then I returned and lay down outside Scarecrow's door, a watchdog he could not pass.

CHAPTER 6

How can I describe Scarecrow? It would be like trying to tell of all the world in a few words, of the smooth fields of ice, the ridges of mountain, the ripple of the sea, the sponge of jungle, the waving hair of vast, corn-growing plains, the warts of cities, the green skin of meadows. Scarecrow was like a whole world in himself. He was made up of many countries and climates, and some of these were utterly foreign to me, while others were more home than any home I had ever seen. To look at him was splendid. He walked proudly, like a prince, and his body was a fine good shape, as a seedling is when it has had plenty of space to grow. At first he was too white, like a plant that has been kept in a dark corner, but even then it was beautiful to watch the muscles moving in his back and shoulders as he worked. They moved as though they were alive, as an unborn baby moves in its mother's belly. There was a grace about him, too, not the grace of a dancer or anyone womanish, but the grace of a powerful horse that takes a pride in placing each foot right. I have seen plenty of men working on farms. They usually do the jobs efficiently enough, but to watch them is to see nothing but a job being done. With Scarecrow it was different. He did the

jobs just as quickly and efficiently, but with him it was as if the way of doing them mattered most. To see him doing the most ordinary work was like watching a priest conducting a service or a poet writing a poem, and I could never have enough of looking at him. His face? What can I say about his face? That it was lean, with broad high cheek bones? That his eyes were green flecked with brown like a woodland ride dusted with leaves in autumn? That his lips were thin and straight when he drew them together, but curved unexpectedly when he relaxed his watchfulness? These things tell nothing, for faces are no more than lamp shades, and it is the light behind them which brings out the meaning of what is written on them.

I was a little stiff and cold after sleeping outside Scarecrow's door, but that did not trouble me. I have always been able to sleep in odd places, like the animals do. The earth feels no harder to me than a mattress does, and when I was a child I sometimes slept in the fork of a tree and did not fall out. So I crept up to my room with my blanket very early, glad and excited because Scarecrow was still safely with me, and because I should have the joy of preparing his breakfast.

My father had been thinking what Scarecrow should do, and it was amusing to see how anxious he was that there should be enough work, and how he was troubled that he might not have given him the most tiring and tedious jobs and kept the pleasant ones for himself. There was plenty to do at that time, with the potatoes to be planted and the sugar beets to be hoed, and the fences in a terrible state of disrepair on account of my father never having the time. It was a thing he had said over and over again. "Must do something about those fences, soon as I've a moment to spare." But as soon as he had one, some other urgent job came along, and the fences never got done. The farm was all right until all my brothers had married or found some other reason for leaving home. My father had kept them working every instant of their waking hours, and begrudged them every instant of sleeping. Sometimes I wondered whether that was why they had left. After they had gone, it was very different for my father. Either he was too mean to pay a man, or he could not afford to, for he managed by employing casual labor at haymaking and harvest, and somehow struggled along the rest of the time by himself. Yes, of course he had me, but, as he was always telling me, I was of little or no use.

Now to watch him planning a day with hired help was like watching a child with a new toy. He gloated over the work Scarecrow was to do. He repeated his orders again and again, and could not seem to find tasks enough to satisfy him. I was afraid Scarecrow would be angry, or, if he did so much work, that he would be exhausted. I even opened my mouth to protest, but I closed it again before a sound could escape. I had never dared to cross my father, and although Scarecrow had given me courage, he was still too new to have changed the habit of obedience.

I looked at Scarecrow to see whether he was dismayed, but he only smiled and said, "My name is not Samson, Farmer."

"I wouldn't know," replied my father, "because you ain't told me your name. Could be anything. Could be Cain, come to that."

That drove all caution from me. "Oh, no!" I cried. "Cain was a—"

But they were not listening. My father was staring at Scarecrow, his eyes sly, as they are at market when he is aiming to buy cattle, and Scarecrow was staring back at him, his eyes admitting nothing, but his mouth half laughing, not afraid at all. "If I do all those chores you've mentioned, Farmer, you won't care if my name is Judas."

And my father, realizing the truth of this, drew back and grunted and looked as pleased as ever he was able to.

I do not know how I did my indoor work that day. The birds were singing as though they were in Heaven instead of on earth. Every room had its impatient fly buzzing on the windowpane. Far in the distance I heard the cuckoo. Each spring set the blood pounding in my body and the queer fancies running through my head, as indeed it should, for nature knows what is right for each season, and in spring nature acts in a wild and abandoned way, a way which, in the pure stillness of the winter or the ripe soberness of the autumn, would not seem respectable. But this spring it was worse and yet better. I pulsed as if there were a heart in every part of my body, and yet I was not racked with empty desire. My desire had a direction and a goal.

My father was not one to leave off in the middle of his labor, and so I took his midday meal to him wherever he worked. Today I took Scarecrow's as well.

I feared they might be together, but my father was using the tractor, harrowing the far fields, and had left Scarecrow

to hoe the sugar beets by hand. I gave my father his food, and then he insisted on unwrapping Scarecrow's, to see whether I had favored him. It was lucky I had not, or I would have got into trouble, but in my pocket was a small, shriveled apple left over from last year.

Scarecrow saw me coming, and stopped working to watch me as I crossed the field. That made me confused. I felt my face going hot, and I stumbled as I walked. There was suddenly a longing in me to run away and hide. Yet what did I fear? Was he not my scarecrow?

I went more and more slowly as I drew near to him, and I wondered what I should say. Usually I do not talk unless people speak to me, but now I wanted to show him that I was clever and sensible, so I said, "Hullo!"

"Hullo!" he replied, and smiled down on me, leaning on his hoe.

I held out the food. "This is for you."

"Thank you!" He looked round, as if wondering where and how to eat it.

"You'd best sit under the hedge," I told him. "It's shady, and it smells good."

He went to the edge of the field and sat down and began to eat, and I sat and watched him.

"What about you?" he asked.

"I have eaten."

We were silent for a few minutes, and the cuckoos were calling without ceasing. "Don't they ever stop?" he asked. "It's enough to drive you mad."

I laughed. "They don't drive me mad, because I am a little mad."

"Who says so?"

"Oh, everybody. My father, my sisters and brothers, my schoolteachers. First time you hear the cuckoo call, it's good luck if it comes from the right, and bad luck from the left."

"Which way did you hear it?"

"I don't know. I can't always remember which is my right hand, and there was no one to tell me."

Scarecrow lifted his head and breathed deeply, sucking greedily at the air. "It's peaceful here. I can't think why anyone should want anything different."

"My sisters and brothers don't like it. They say it is hard work."

"There are worse things than work."

They say nothing ever happens.

"Do you think that?"

"Oh, no! Things are happening every minute. The sky and the sea and the land keep changing. And there are so many animals and birds and insects, always busy."

"So it's as thickly populated as a large town."

"But the creatures that live here don't take any notice of you. I don't like towns. They frighten me."

"Me, too." I stared at him. What could he know of towns? But he went on talking. "I would like to stay here for ever."

"You shall," I promised.

He shook his head. "I must be on my way."

"You can't!" I cried, in a panic. "You are my scarecrow. You mustn't leave me."

"Poor girl! You don't have much fun, do you?"

"Fun?" I frowned. What had fun to do with it?

"Have you a sweetheart?"

"No!" I was shocked. How could I think of anyone else, now that I had Scarecrow?

"A woman needs something more solid than clouds and flowers and butterflies. Are you fond of your father?"

"No. I don't like him."

"He seems a hard man," Scarecrow said, thoughtfully.

I wriggled nearer to him, traveling on my knees. I was so anxious that I forgot my queer, new, shy feeling. "Scarecrow, you don't mean it, do you, that you are going away?"

"I must."

"But why? Why must you?"

"That's a secret."

"You can't have secrets from me."

"What a strange creature you are!" He was smiling at me, and there seemed to be mockery in his smile.

"You can't go away!" I cried, desperately. "I made you, and I can take you to pieces again. I can destroy you."

He frowned, and his black brows coming down made his face look as angry as thunder. "You wouldn't do anything. You wouldn't give me away."

"Of course I wouldn't give you to anyone. You are mine. I want you for myself."

He sighed, but the thunder-look went. "I don't believe you understand."

"I understand everything," I boasted. It was not true, but somehow I had to persuade him to stay. "You are safe

here," I said, because I could tell he was frightened of something.

"What makes you think that?"

"No one ever comes, and it is always safe where there are no people."

"The police came. They'll return."

"The police!" I pretended to despise them. "They were looking for someone, and there wasn't anyone here. Why should they come back?"

"You never know, with them. Besides, what is there here for a man?"

That was a strange question, I thought. There was the same here for a man as there was anywhere else.

"I'll have to make my way along the coast," he said, staring out over the field, but seeing his plans rather than what was before his eyes. "To Portsmouth, perhaps. Or, better still, Southampton. Might get a boat. No use stowing away. They make too many inquiries. It won't be easy to find a job, without any papers."

"Are you a sailor?"

"No."

"Then why do you want a boat?"

"I must get out of the country."

"You mean, go away from England?"

"Yes."

"But then I shall never see you again."

He took his mind away from his plans, and looked at me, really seeing me. His face went soft and kind, and he spoke gently. "Agnes, you are a good girl. You've helped me, and I can't say how grateful I am. Will you do something more for me?"

"Anything," I promised, readily.

"Then help me to get away."

I wound my fingers in and out of each other, looking down at them so he should not see my face. He had tricked me, I felt, by making me promise, and then asking something I could not possibly do. "How can I?"

"I shall need food and—Agnes, I don't like to ask you this—but if you could let me have some money, I'd return it as soon as I could."

"I haven't any money."

"But your father—"

"You don't suppose he leaves it where I can get at it, do

your. He took it away. People like me, who are not quite right in the head, might steal it."

"Well, I'll have to manage without. Somehow. But the food, that's vital."

"When do you want it?"

He hesitated, thinking. "Tonight? Yes, it would be better to travel in the dark."

"You'll be tired, after you've done all Father has told you to do. Besides, night is the time of thieves and killers. It's when the foxes rob the hen house. If you're seen at night, there will be suspicion on you."

"Perhaps you are right. It might be wise to have some sleep, and start early in the morning."

When I left him he believed I was going to help him to get away. I walked home slowly, thinking hard. It is not easy for me to think when there are outside distractions, because little things make me forget what was in my mind. I think best in bed, with my eyes tightly closed and my mind spread out neatly in front of me. But this was an important and desperate matter, so I resolutely drew a curtain between me and the outside world. "I am not looking at you," I said to the white clusters of hawthorn. "I am not even smelling you. And that goes for the cow parsley and the ragged robin and the periwinkle and the dandelion. I have to be smart and cunning. I have to be smarter than my father, smarter even than Scarecrow."

Presently I found the apple I had intended to give to him, and decided to eat it myself. But it was dry and tasteless, so I threw it away.

CHAPTER 7

I waited until evening, because then, when the work was done, my father would know if he was pleased with Scarecrow. I waited until after the meal, because of my father being in a good temper. And then I found I had to wait until bedtime, because Scarecrow was in the room with us.

It seemed late to be leaving my efforts. Scarecrow was de-

terminated to go before dawn. Supposing I failed? Supposing my plan was no good like most of the things I did? I was so nervous that I could not keep still. When I am neverous there is an itch which comes to my body. It is a playful thing, jumping backwards and forwards from one part to another. At first, perhaps, I feel a desire to scratch my head, but scarcely have I done this than there is an unbearable irritation in the sole of my foot, and before this is appeased my fingers have to fly to my back, scrabbling to reach that awkward spot between the shoulder blades.

My father glanced at me once or twice, and then he suddenly shouted, "Stop it!" making Scarecrow jump. Father grinned at that. He enjoys seeing people startled or put out. He jerked his head towards me. "I've seen plenty of dogs act that way, but never a woman."

"Humans get fleas, as well as dogs," Scarecrow told him.

"It isn't a flea," I said. "Fleas can't jump from your head to your feet in an instant."

"Keep still, anyway," my father growled.

"I can't," I said, miserably, and I couldn't. I was worried.

I wished Scarecrow would go away for a few minutes, so that I could talk to my father, but he didn't, and I could think of no excuse for asking him to do so.

So I had to be patient, and at last the evening ended and we made ready for bed. I said good night and went up to my room, but I did not undress. I left the door open, and listened, and presently I crept down to my father's bedroom.

He was in his vest, his trousers unfastened ready to take down, and I could not help noticing the difference between his body and Scarecrow's. He was not really fat, but it was as if his chest had slipped down to his abdomen, for from the shoulders he sloped outward, and there was something almost indecent about the proud, forward-jutting of his belly. Every exposed part of him was covered with hard, reddish hair. To me he looked repulsively hideous.

"What d'you want?" he growled, surprised, for I rarely entered his room when he was in it.

"Father, Scarecrow is leaving in the morning."

"Who says so?"

"He does."

"Oh? He never mentioned it to me."

"Perhaps he thought you might stop him."

"Why should I? He can please himself."

"He'll have had two nights' lodging for only one day's work."

My father had not thought of that. "So he will. The bastard."

"Are you pleased with his work?"

"It'll do," my father admitted, grudgingly. It was not his way to praise anyone.

"There's haymaking coming on. It would save money if you kept him for that."

"What's it to do with you?" my father demanded, suddenly suspicious.

"Nothing, Father."

"Don't you let me find you getting up to any tricks now! Just because there's a youngish man on the farm."

I clasped my hands. "I won't, Father, really I won't. I don't know any tricks."

"You'd learn 'em fast enough, give you half a chance."

"I was thinking of you, Father. You need help."

"So's you can idle away your time, I suppose, you lazy baggage!"

I did not mind that he should think me lazy. If only he would keep Scarecrow he could accuse me of anything, except perhaps of getting up to tricks. I did not know what the tricks were, but the voice he used when speaking of them was somehow shame-making. "For some of the chores I'm not strong enough," I excused myself.

"Rubbish! You're as strong as a draught horse. Those that are weak in the head are always strong in the body to make up for it. I could do with a good man, though."

"Yes. You could."

"I'd give him his keep," my father conceded, generously, "as long as he didn't expect wages."

"But he says he's going."

"Then there's no call to think about it any more, is there?"

"Maybe you could persuade him to stay."

"Oh? And how would I do that?"

"He's feared of the police."

"The police, is it? Then we're best shut of him. I'm not wishing to get mixed up in anything criminal. It's hard enough to stay on the right side of the law even when you're trying."

"The police won't come here, and even if they did, you wouldn't know anything."

"Mighty crafty all of a sudden, aren't you, my girl?"

I pretended to sulk. "I was only trying to help you. I'm smart, only you won't listen to me."

He gave a bark of laughter. "And what does Miss Clever suggest?"

"Go down to his room now. He won't be asleep. Tell him you want him to stay, and if he refuses—"

I hesitated, because from there it was not really clear in my mind what he could do.

"Go on with the lesson, Miss!" my father said, sarcastically, but he buttoned up his trousers again, and this encouraged me, because it showed he was going to do what I suggested. And then, in a flash, it was perfectly clear how we could get Scarecrow in our power. I did not think how Scarecrow would feel. It was as if, in a queer way, he had ceased to exist. There was only Father and I both, for the first time in our lives, wanting the same thing, and I knowing how to get it. It was a bright, distinct picture in my mind, not blurred like most of my pictures are. I was proud of myself that I could make such a picture, and I knew it would work.

"You say to him that you know he's going away, and you know where he is going."

"Where is he going?"

"To Portsmouth or Southampton, to find a ship. You say to him that if he goes you will tell the police, and they will follow him very quickly."

My father frowned. "What has he done?"

I was amazed at his stupidity. "What could he do but keep the birds away from the corn? It is just in his mind to be afraid of the police. The same thing has always been in my mind, and I have done nothing."

"All right." My father moved towards the door. "I'll threaten to report him. Maybe I will, too. It's my duty."

"That is not quite all. You must also say that if he will stay and help you with the hay, you'll not tell the police, and if the police come here you'll hide him."

"No, no! I'm not looking for trouble."

"But you could *say* it, Father."

He stared at me. "I thought you were simple. It seems you're growing sly. I'll have to keep an eye on you."

I smiled, as if he had promised me a treat. It did not matter what he said to me or did to me, as long as he forced Scarecrow to stay. Usually he thought me more silly than I really was. Now he thought me cleverer than I was. I knew it was only for Scarecrow I could be cunning. Animals do terribly brave and wonderful things when fighting for their lives, and I was fighting for more than life.

When my father had gone, the strength drained out of me. I leaned against the lintel of the door, sick and trembling. My hands were wet with sweat, and there was a sour taste in my mouth. I wanted to stay and discover whether the plan was successful, but I dared not. If my father came back and told me, I should give myself away. Whether the news was good or bad, I should give myself away, for the screens I had used were all torn down, and when my father looked at me he would see plainly the great flames leaping from my desire for Scarecrow.

So I dragged myself to my room, and undressed and got into bed. I could not hear voices from there, but after awhile I heard doors open and close. For a long time I did not sleep. I held the cool pillow against my body, but soon that, too, became hot.

In the morning I was afraid to go downstairs, and kept inventing things to do in my room, so that after all I was late and my father was angry and would not have told me anything even if I had asked him.

But I did not need to ask him. Scarecrow gave me the answer, for as he passed me he looked at me as if I were not there, or as if I were no more than a piece of chaff falling from the threshing machine.

CHAPTER 8

That was the strangest time, for Scarecrow to be there and yet not there for me. It was like holding a moth in your hand and finding, when you opened your fingers, that it had gone. I tried to understand what had happened, but it was difficult, though I felt that his silence had something to do with my asking my father to make him stay. Was he angry?

But no, it could not be that. I had seen my father angry often enough, and I felt certain that anger was a frothing and a foaming and a boiling over of human flame, not a cool, silvery slipperiness like the skin of a live fish when it slips out of your hand. Once or twice I felt the cold touch of fear, wondering whether perhaps he was beginning to change back into the lifeless scarecrow I had made, whether this was a blindness coming on him, whether his face would melt away to the blankness of a pumpkin, and his live muscles dry to the heavy immobility of sawdust. I knew then that this was the last thing I wanted, that having found the so-much-more, I could not do with the so-much-less. But after a time I satisfied myself that his eyes worked properly for everything else he saw. It was only I who was apparently invisible to him. This also troubled me. What if I were not really there at all, if I had died and become no more than a disturbance in the air or a tiny shadow against the sun? For a whole day I was unhappy about this, until my father scolded me, and then I was glad and knew that I truly lived.

At first I did not mind Scarecrow not noticing me. I was proud and happy that my plan had succeeded, and that he was not going away. But when a week had passed, I began to grow restless and impatient. When he had been my lifeless scarecrow in the field it had been sufficient for him to exist in my heart, but now nothing would do but for me to exist in his as well.

I tried to find an opportunity of talking to him alone, but my father seemed continuously to be within sight or hearing. I became feverish with the pain of waiting. Spring was swelling into summer. The meadow grass was beginning to glow with the purple bloom of ripeness, and over the hedgerows and the grassy places descended layer after layer of leaves and flowers, like patterned green eider downs. Time was passing. That was a truth which had never struck me before. Time had been merely something that was measured on clocks, just as the outside world, more sensibly, was measured by seasons. But now a feeling of urgency came upon me. I must hurry, or I should be too late. Too late for what?

My chance came on the day when my father went to market. Scarecrow stayed behind to work, and I could see how pleased my father was to be setting out like a gentleman while his laborer remained to tend the farm.

I did not rush straight out, but got all my chores done just

as if Father had been home. This made me feel light-hearted and easy in my conscience, and took away the fear I sometimes had that my father was watching me even when he was away. Perhaps this fear came from the lecture he always gave me before he left, assuring me sternly that if I neglected my duties he would be sure to know. This so impressed me that I had the feeling he possessed an extra pair of eyes which he had placed somewhere to keep me under observation. So today I made no attempt to see Scarecrow until I took him his midday meal. I had made it as tasty and beautiful as I knew how, with radishes and the tenderest babies of spring onions, and I had baked a pasty filled with small, new gooseberries. The gooseberries should not have been picked yet, but waited until they were large and we got the most out of them. My father would have been very angry, but how could he count every gooseberry upon the bushes?

Scarecrow took the food from me without a word, and sat down and began to eat as though I were not there. I watched him, and presently I said, "Father has gone to market."

Scarecrow stared thoughtfully at a very small white cloud. It was as though I had not spoken, and I began to wonder whether I had.

"Scarecrow!" I held out my hands as if I were begging. "I am here."

He looked at me then, yet right beyond me, to the far corner of the field, I should think.

"You can talk, Scarecrow. I hear you talking to Father. Why will you not talk to me?"

The silence hung tight and quivering between us, a silence made even quieter by the monotonous calling of the cuckoos and the distant laughter of a gull and the buzzing of many insects.

I felt a panic rising up in me, and I knew I could not bear it much longer. Gently I touched him on the leg.

He showed his awareness of me then, for he pulled his leg away as though my fingers had been a hornet stinging it.

"If you would only tell me why!" I implored.

His interest returned to his food. He acted as if he were a man alone in a field, and he acted so well that the band of my endurance snapped. I sprang to my feet. "Scarecrow!" I yelled. "Scarecrow!" And then I began to scream, holding my hands to my ears because I myself could not bear the noise.

It was a dreadful invasion of a beautiful day. I knew, even through my screams, that the creatures around me had ceased their songs in sheer dismay, that even the startled grass had heard.

Scarecrow jumped up, took me by the shoulders, and shook me. "Stop it, girl! Stop it! Do you hear?" He raised his arm to strike me, then lowered it and let me go.

I stopped screaming and flung myself on my face on the ground, sobbing, shaking, unable to control myself.

"If people hear you, what will they think?"

That seemed a queer thing to say. There were no people near, but if there had been, how could their thoughts be of interest to us? There were other things to be settled between us. I went on sobbing.

"What's the matter with you, Agnes? Are you crazy?"

I wanted to answer him, because at last he had spoken to me. I wanted to answer him before he changed his mind and went into his silence again. There was something else I wanted, too. I wanted him to comfort me, take me into his arms and stroke my head, as a mother would do. But he did not touch me. He stood tall against the sky, looking down on me.

I tried to stop the deep, retching sobs which tore at me, and gradually they eased. "It is—a devil in me," I gasped. "When—when the devil gets in me I have to do something fast and strong. I scream or run or hit the ground."

"Well, what put the devil in you this time?"

"You."

"Me? I've done nothing."

"You wouldn't talk to me."

"Why should I? You are a traitor."

"What is a traitor?"

"Someone who puts greed before friendship or love."

"I don't understand."

Scarecrow looked at me sternly. "You told your father how to keep me a prisoner. You pretended to be my friend, but all you wanted was your own way. If I had escaped, you would have informed the police."

"No. I never tell the police. I don't like them."

"Then how did your father know about them?"

"I said he was to say it to you," I admitted, proudly. "It was to make you afraid, so that you would stay."

"There's a dirty trick!" he exclaimed, disgustedly.

That made me laugh. He was making such a fuss about nothing. "It is not dirty to speak of the police. When you are children, your parents threaten to send for a policeman, but they are not traitors."

"That's different. I'm no child."

"No, and you are too big to be afraid of policemen. Only children fear them." I hesitated, and then I added, because I wanted to be quite truthful, "I am a little afraid of them myself, but I am foolish."

"Why do you want to keep me here?"

"Because here you belong. Here you are safe and happy," I replied glibly. It occurred to me that, though I did want to be quite truthful with him, this was not all of the truth. Almost I confessed it, but had I done so, he would then have asked, "What other reason have you?" and I should not have known what to say, because I could not think of the words. I only knew, very deeply inside of me, that it was not only for his safety and happiness that I desired him to stay.

However, my reply appeared to satisfy him, for his face softened, and he looked at me with pity. "Poor Agnes! As gentle as a lamb and as fierce as a tiger."

I was suddenly happy. I wanted to dance and sing, and I would have done so had I been alone, but Scarecrow made me shy. He was only one, and yet it was as if a crowd were watching me. "You are not angry with me any more?"

He gave a rueful smile. I know it was rueful, because his lips twisted crookedly at one corner. "What's the use? I might as well be angry with my hoe, or with the weeds I'm grubbing up."

"Weeds can't help growing," I pointed out.

"That's what I mean."

"And if your hoe doesn't feel right to you, you can either reshape it or throw it away."

"A woman is not the same as a hoe."

"But we were not speaking of women."

"No, we were not, were we?"

"And now—you will talk to me?"

"When it's necessary to talk."

"And you won't go away?"

"Not until you set me free."

"That's funny," I laughed. "I haven't tied you up."

"You have bound me hand and foot. But remember," and

for an instant he looked fierce again. "my soul is still my own."

I frowned, trying to recollect. "I don't believe I gave you a soul."

He chuckled at that, the first really amused sound I had heard coming from him. "There were also other vital parts you omitted, but I'm glad to say I acquired them somehow."

"I hadn't very good materials," I excused myself.

"No. There are limits to what you can do with a barrel and sandbags."

"Sawdust bags," I corrected.

"Though quite a lot has been achieved with a rag, a bone and a hank of hair."

"Bones aren't much use without something to cover them. Hair's nice and lifelike, though."

"Ah, but they were used by an older and more experienced Creator than you."

"I did you well."

"Yes, you did me well. Now what about devising an attractive little female scarecrow to match me?"

"No!" I was suddenly angry, and I shouted. I do not know why I was angry. Indeed, it seems stupid to me when I look back on it. But at the time there was a prickling and a discomfort about my body, and the thought of a woman scarecrow was disgusting.

Perhaps Scarecrow was afraid that another devil was about to enter me, for he said, quickly. "I was only teasing."

It was time for him to go on with his work. I had an uneasy feeling that my father was somewhere watching us. But I had to be sure of Scarecrow. "You won't run away?"

"No."

"Promise?"

"How can I run away?" he burst out. "I don't trust your father." He paused, then added, "Or you."

So it was all right. I drew a deep breath. "There is everything you want here," I said, as if he were a child and I promising him a treat.

"But the best is missing."

"What's that?"

He looked towards the south hedge, beyond which would be the distant blue line of the sea. "I could find it there," he said.

CHAPTER 9

Always my father was bad-tempered at haymaking. This was not strange, for it is a worrying time, when most farmers are anxious, and many are irritable. For my father it was worse than for a happy man. He looked for trouble even where trouble was not, and expected things to turn out badly for him. Nature was his enemy, and no weather had ever been invented which would please him. I often wondered whether there had been a time when he had found joy in life. Surely, I thought, he must have loved my mother, and taken pleasure in their mating and the begetting of so many children. Perhaps, then, there had been a softness about him. But though my memory went back a long way, me being the eldest, I could not remember him as otherwise. He had a certain respect for mother, and she was able at least to restrain him from beating us girls, yet I never saw him smile at her. He was glum and fractious and swift to find fault. To me it seems that his intercourse with her must have been practical and businesslike, with no more gentleness or imagination than his ram used, or his bull. How could he see it as anyway different from the affairs of his farmyard, he who had never read in books of the romance which lifts human relationships from lust to love? Some are able to do without books, if there is a light in their hearts, but my father had no light. When my mother died he was still a young man, as men go, but, as far as I know, he never considered taking another woman. I don't think he really liked women, and, without liking, even lust must after a time pale and fade. Perhaps his very anger was an expression of his frustration, and of the virility still-born within him. Now that I look, even after these few months, I can almost be sorry for him, but at the time I was bitter at his unfairness and at the way he was goading me into hatred. I did not want to hate him. Of that I am sure.

This year's haysel, I must agree, was enough to try the temper of an angel. The grass was ripe, and the spring rains followed by warm sun had made the crop as long and thick as

ever we get it, for we are too near the sea to have the deep hushness of the inland valleys. No, there was nothing wrong with the hay, only with the weather. Rain wouldn't have been so bad, because you know where you are with rain, and can wait until it stops. This was nothing like so straightforward. It was hot and close, and every day threatened thunder without fulfilling its threat. The clouds would pile up, copper-colored and ugly, like something out of Hell, so that you could almost smell the sulphur. You would think, Here it comes! and be glad because it would soon be over. But it wasn't. The clouds, leering, parted and dispersed, and the evening sky would be as innocent as a baby. "Tomorrow," my father would say, but tomorrow brought more clouds, and distant growls of a thunder, to warn us not to take liberties. With this came a clammy heat which made breathing an effort instead of a pleasure, and which made quick movement an impossibility.

At last my father dared wait no longer. He must cut the grass, then hope the rains would not come and stay until it lay sodden and rotten in its swathes.

I remember that morning so well. I had washed the sheets and was hanging them out to dry in the garden. Our garden isn't really what you would call a garden, not like those you see in towns, gardens which are spick-and-span and quite useless except for looking at. Ours is all dug except for one large patch of grass. It has vegetables, according to what we want, and at the bottom a great bed of rhubarb, which looks foreign and like a jungle to me, because of its enormous leaves. Up the sides are gooseberry and currant bushes, and a few raspberry canes. There are three apple trees, old and bent. You have to dig round them, and their roots are a nuisance, but the largest is a friend, for it grows near the edge of the grass and gives shade, provided you are at leisure to sit there when the sun happens to be in the right place. My father left the grass so that my mother would have somewhere to dry the washing. It is coarse meadow grass, and would take a month of Sundays to make it into a lawn. But no one has ever had a month of Sundays, or even one Sunday to spare for it, let alone a lawn mower, so the grass grows broad and tangled and tussocky. I longed to have flowers, but my father declared they were a waste of time, and would not give me money for seed. Still, we were not entirely without. During our child-

hood we had at one time and another carried home roots of violet and bluebell and primrose and cowslip, and planted them, and scraps of that creeping white flower we call snow-in-summer, which they say does not grow wild in other parts of the country and which now rioted round the house, close under the walls, looking like a spotless white frill about the neck of a shabby old lady. There were also marigolds. Goodness knows who had planted them, but each year they seeded themselves faithfully, and greeted us with as glorious a blaze of color as might have cost us pounds. They were not out on that morning, of course, but they were ready and waiting.

Usually I like washing clothes, and I like to see them white and straining on the line. They look like new beginnings or new promises. But that morning I was not enjoying myself. I felt heavy and tired, and everything was too much bother. The day reflected back my feelings, for it was hot and lifeless, and the sky was quilted in gray cloud, low and level, so that you could almost believe you could reach up and touch it.

I had the last sheet out when I heard the car coming up the lane. The only time anyone drives right up like that is when Father has bought some stock, or is selling some, and the cattle truck comes. But he had not said anything to me, and it did not sound as heavy as the truck, so I stayed behind the sheet and peered out.

It was a quiet morning. The birds and the insects hated the thundery heat just as much as I did, and were sitting silent, saving their strength. Only the chicks were peep-peeping, but they were newly hatched and had no more sense.

The noise of the car was horrible in the quietness, and the sight of it was more horrible still, for it was the police car I had seen in the lane the day Scarecrow came to life. At least, I think it was the same. How was I to know whether they had more than one of such monstrosities? A policeman was driving, and someone was sitting beside him. But he was not a policeman. He was a man.

I stayed behind the sheet, half wrapping myself in it. It was damp and cool, and felt lovely. I heard the car stop, and voices talking as they got out, and the car doors shutting. I was too frightened to think much, and at that time I was ignorant of many things I know now, yet vague ideas crept into my mind unasked. I realized, for instance, that these men were a danger to Scarecrow, though I had not the slightest

knowledge as to why this was so. I realized, also, that he would be afraid of them, and that he must be protected, and that they must not see him. Yet in my stupidity I could only hide there and pray that they would go away.

It is well known that in a farmhouse one does not trouble to use the front door. Why should one, when the back door is so much more convenient for finding people? The two men, I thought, would not know this. They would knock on the front door, foolishly, and when no one came they would say, "Oh, they are not at home," and would get into their car and drive off, and I could forget all about their visit.

They knocked on the front door. The fact that it was just as I had expected seemed immensely funny to me. I started to laugh, and had to stuff the edge of the sheet in my mouth, so that I should not be heard.

They did not knock again, and I was just beginning to wonder why they had not got into the car when I heard a voice say, "There she is!"

I stayed perfectly still, as if by immobility I could find invisibility, but of course I was as conspicuous against the sheet as a butterfly pinned on a piece of white paper. They had not been so foolish after all, these two, but had walked round and caught me from the back.

I turned slowly to face them. I could have run away, I suppose, for I can run faster than any man in heavy shoes, and I am good at creeping under the tiniest bush for hiding place, but it came to me that these men were very determined, and I was the only one who could help Scarecrow.

I recognized the policeman who had driven the car. He was one of those I had met by the cornfield, the one who had not liked jokes. He had a very mean face, I thought, with a nose flattened as though he had run into a barn door, and his body was squat and without grace.

"This is the girl, sir," he said. Then he looked at me and told me, severely, as though I should have known without being told, "This is Detective Inspector Pennyfeather."

I knew about detectives, of course. In one of my mother's books there had been a story of Sherlock Holmes. Detectives were clever, and frequently quite kind. This one had a thin face and wintry blue eyes, but he smiled at me, and when people smile at me it is as if we are brothers and sisters. I wanted to tell him about Scarecrow, and ask him to help.

Perhaps he could persuade Scarecrow that there was no need to go to Portsmouth or Southampton, that he would not find what he wanted on the sea, for the sea was only water. But the policeman was beside the detective, and the policeman mustn't be told anything.

"Have you seen a strange man round these parts?" the detective asked.

I answered promptly, glad to be able to say what was sensible and, it seemed to me, true. "No. We don't get strangers here."

"She wouldn't know, sir," the policeman put in, and his face looked meaner than ever.

The detective smiled again. "Oh, I think she would. You'd tell us, wouldn't you, if you saw a man, a bad man?"

"Yes."

"We want to look after you, protect you."

"I don't like bad men."

"Of course not! Who lives here with you?"

"My father."

"No one else?"

"Only my scarecrow."

"Who is your scarecrow?"

"I made him to keep the birds from the corn."

"I see."

"I told you, sir," the policeman said, triumphantly.

"Yes." The detective looked thoughtful. "Well, now, where is your father?"

That was the most difficult question he had asked. I knew where my father was. He was in the meadow which has always been called The Lynch. He was mowing, and Scarecrow was with him. The Lynch is at the boundary of our land and is the farthest from the sea. The best grass grows there, because it is in a dip and the soil is deeper. You can't see it from the farm.

The detective moved his feet impatiently as I hesitated. "Did you hear? Where is your father?"

"I don't know exactly. But maybe I could find him for you."

"Right. We'll come with you."

That was what I didn't want. If I went by myself I could warn Scarecrow, and he could stay where he was, while my father came back with me.

"Which way?" demanded the policeman.

"I can go alone."

"I expect you can," the detective said, humoring me. "You are used to being alone. Pretty isolated spot. But this time we'll keep you company. That'll be nice, won't it?"

"I like being alone," I grumbled, but I could not stop them walking beside me. It was a terrible problem to know what to do. They had upset my plans. I led them down the track, to the lane, and then up the old path towards the sea.

"This is where we lost him before," said the policeman, when we came to the cornfield, "and where we met the girl."

"Did you now? Wasn't it rather peculiar that she didn't see him then?"

"Not necessarily," the policeman told him. "She was coming up the path, and the dogs had already lost the scent."

"Dogs, a car, and several intelligent police officers," said the detective, in a voice which sounded like joking, "and yet you let him get away. It has caused us quite a lot of trouble."

"Yes, sir."

"Have you any explanation for it, apart from the official one?"

"No, sir. Only that it was uncanny."

"And what do you mean by that? Did the fugitive dematerialize?"

"I beg your pardon, sir?"

"Vanish into thin air."

"Oh! Well, no, I suppose not. People don't do that sort of thing. But it was just as if he had."

We stood on top of the hill. The land sloped down a little towards the cliff. The cliff edge was about three hundred yards away from us, and beyond that was the sea. The detective breathed deeply.

"It's no use doing that," I told him. "The sea doesn't smell today. It won't, until we've had a storm."

He laughed. "If you lived in a town, you'd find this air exhilarating, storm or no storm. But I fancy we came here for a definite purpose. I don't see your father."

I looked round. "Nor do I."

"What did you expect he would be doing here?"

The bells of danger began clanging loudly in my ears. I made my expression as vacant and idiotic as I could. "I don't know. I never know what he is doing. Shall we look somewhere else?"

"She can't help it," the policeman said.

We went back, and all the way I was wondering desperately how to avoid The Lynch. I could pretend our land did not go as far as that, but it would mean they still had not seen my father, and they would not stop looking until they found him.

I took them to several other places, not because I thought it would do any good, but simply to gain time, though I could not see how time would help me. Soon I should have to prepare the meal to take to the meadow, and what would the detective say when he saw two packages?

"Well," he said, at last, "we have been south, east and west. Doesn't your land extend to the north?"

"Where is the north?" I asked, stupidly, I, who had known the four winds since babyhood!

He pointed it out to me. "Oh, behind the farm," I said, innocently. "Yes. Let's go there."

We had only gone a short distance when we heard the tractor. "Getting warmer," muttered the policeman.

It seemed hopeless, yet there are times when even without hope you go on trying. I flung my arms in the air and started shouting. "Yoo-hoo! Father! Here I come!" in a loud, half-witted kind of voice. Of course he could not hear above the noise he was making.

I turned to the two beside me. "Isn't it lovely! We've found him!"

"About time, too," grumbled the policeman, who talked as if his feet were hurting. I suppose he was used to pavements.

I began to dance and jump in the air. It was a thing I hated to do in public, like this. People may say I am a little queer in the head, but I dislike making a deliberate exhibition of myself. However, it had to be done. After a few more silly capers I changed, almost imperceptibly, into a run, and flew towards the nearest corner of The Lynch, where the hedge was low and I could overlook the whole meadow. I knew the two behind me were hurrying, if not running. I had only a few seconds to spare.

I waved and shrieked. Scarecrow saw me first, shouted something to my father, and the noise of the tractor died down. "Yippee, Father! I've got a beautiful policeman. We're coming to see you."

My voice is strong, and I knew the word "policeman" had floated clearly down.

By the time the two reached me, there was no sign of Scarecrow. For an instant I thought I saw suspicion on the face of the detective, but I was not worried. I knew I could dispel it. I could do anything now. I had won. I had saved Scarecrow. He would like me for it, and would never call me a traitor again. We should be friends, and he would trust me. Flushed with victory, I spoke like an excited child. "See! There he is! There is my father! We found him after all. Let's go down and talk to him."

The Lynch was still and sultry. My father waited, passive and noncommittal, still sitting on the tractor. Not a leaf in the hedge moved to point to Scarecrow's passing, not a twig was out of place.

I wanted to stay and hear what was said, but I dared not, or I should have given everything away. After the fear and excitement, a sudden weakness and dizziness had come on me. So I wandered off, as if I were not interested. I went casually and carelessly, straight towards the farm, in case they might be watching me. I did not look for Scarecrow. I did not turn my head to right or left, or even let my eyes flicker from side to side. It was a good performance. Even in the midst of my nausea and the pain in my head, I knew I had done well.

But when I reached the farmyard, I went over to the dung heap, and, comforted by its warm and familiar smell, was sick on it.

CHAPTER 10

That afternoon I stayed close to the farm, and though my stomach had emptied, there was still a sickness on me. It was a sickness of fear. I was afraid the police would come back, and I listened so intently for the sound of their car that my ears felt like great caverns into which were sucked all the noises of all the county. I heard the near-by birds, and beyond them I heard other birds, out of sight and far away. It was as if their song were a chain, stretching out until it was pulled tight and thin in the distance. I heard the lonely sound of dogs barking miles off on other farms. I heard an airplane

screaming down the sky, a hurful noise, like tearing calico. I heard the complaints of a cow in heat. And I heard in my ears a roaring as of a wild spring tide, but I knew it was the other tide, the red tide which is inside me and which sometimes beats as madly on the bones as the watery sea beats on the rocks.

Every moment that the police car did not come was a victory, and every few seconds I drew a deep, sighing breath, for it is not possible to breathe while you are listening as intensely as I was. You hold your breath as long as you can, and then you quickly fill your lungs full and start again.

Presently another fear settled on me, that Scarecrow might not return. When he faded away into that hedge he would feel safe. The police would be behind him, and all freedom before him, fields and fields of it. Why should he come back to a place where the police kept looking for him and bothering him? In his mind our farm would be side by side with danger. I know this is true, because it happens to me. Wherever anything frightening or sorrowful occurs, I do not trust that place again. This new worry was so disturbing that I almost went to The Lynch to see whether Scarecrow was there. I even started to go, walking across the yard, and through the gate into the field where the poultry are kept. But in the end I dared not, in case he should not be there, which I could not bear, though I invented another reason for not going. I told myself that my father would be angry at seeing me, because the police must already have angered him, interrupting his work, and anger clung to him like goosegrass clings to your clothes. Whenever I did not want to tell myself the truth, I made my father's anger the excuse, because it was so often true.

Yet I was quite wrong that day, for my father returned in a good humor, and with Scarecrow beside him. I was so relieved that I rushed out to greet them, and my father thought something was amiss.

"What's the matter? They come back?"

I shook my head.

"What you hopping about like that for, then? Haven't you any jobs to do?"

I smiled at Scarecrow, though he didn't notice me, and went back into the house to finish getting the meal.

My father was actually humming to himself as he sat down

to table. True, it was a hymn—one about graves and pains of hell—but at least it was more encouraging than no music. As he ate he kept glancing at Scarecrow in an amused and triumphant sort of way. When he is like that, it means my father has turned something to his own advantage. It usually means trouble for somebody, but I was too happy to care. We had survived the danger of the afternoon, and Scarecrow was here.

In my joy and lightheartedness I actually dared to ask a question, looking at my father for an answer, because he was very cunning and knew a lot more about the ways of men than Scarecrow did.

"Will they come back?" I asked.

He didn't pretend to misunderstand me. There was only one thought in all our minds. "No. Why should they?"

"They may." Scarecrow spoke sharply, for he was nervous and jumpy.

"Why should they?" my father repeated. "Had two false alarms, didn't they?"

"You never know." Scarecrow stopped eating, and began biting his nails. "That's how it is with them. You never know. Might take it into their heads to set a watch on the place. I shouldn't be seen outside."

"Rubbish!" We were having pigs' trotters that night, and my father took up one of the little feet and brandished it at Scarecrow. "They got no time to spare for you. Don't you ever read the papers?"

"I haven't had much chance lately," Scarecrow said. It was polite of him to put it like that, I thought, instead of scoffing at my father for asking such a stupid question. As if scarecrows ever read newspapers!

"Well, if you did you'd see that the police are kept busy. They can't spare men to spy on you. They're taken up with crime—robbery with violence, murders and so on." Suddenly my father gave a loud laugh, as if he had made a joke. It startled me, and Scarecrow just looked sad, as if he hadn't seen the joke, either.

"All the same, it'd be better to get away. At Southampton I'd have a chance—"

"D'you reckon they're daft?" my father inquired, disgustfully. "They'll be on to the ports like a stoat on to a rabbit."

Scarecrow wriggled his shoulders, as if trying to ease a

weight off his back. "There's no sense in getting caught like a rat in a trap."

"Here," my father assured him, "you're more like a bug in a rug."

"You can pick a bug out of a rug."

My father changed his tactics. He drew himself up and pulled the corners of his mouth down, looking virtuous, like he did in church at my mother's funeral. "Tisn't every law-abiding citizen as would run the risk. I'd be in serious trouble if they found you on my land, and if they thought as I was hiding you—"

"Perhaps it would be better if you didn't," Scarecrow said, almost eagerly.

My father shook his head sadly. "What's done can't be undone. Should have gone and reported the moment you set foot in the house."

Scarecrow grinned, his teeth very white in his face, which was now tanned and healthy looking. "Maybe you were scared what I might do."

My father glanced at his gun, which he kept hung high over the mantelpiece, out of the way of us when we were children. "Reckon I can take care of myself. You get so you can on a lonely farm like this."

Scarecrow was silent, and they looked at one another warily, sizing each other up, like men do before they fight. Animals do it, too.

Presently my father went on, as if there had been no pause, "I know my duty to the country, but I've got my duty to my farm, and the way I look at it, that comes first. You're useful round here—"

"That is a great consolation," Scarecrow said, solemnly, but I could feel there was laughter somewhere behind his words.

"Of course, if you wandered off, like, my duty would come heavy on me, and I'd be bound to go to town to tell all I knew."

"You make it more and more difficult to refuse your charming hospitality," Scarecrow spoke with great politeness, as if he'd been asked to a party.

"That's what I'm trying to do," my father replied, placidly.

"Well, we know where we are, don't we?"

"Yes, and we know when we're well off, I hope. You're get-

Who else wants a big raise in pay?

My salary has
increased 400%—
direct result of
my LaSalle studies"

Rudolph Urbatis,
Port Chester, N. Y.



"Salary more than
doubled since
enrolling"

William T. Black,
Canoga Park, Calif.



Income has increased
100 per cent since
graduation"

James L. Yonning,
Manhattan, Kansas



"I now earn three
and a half times my
former pay"

Robert Fisher,
Holbrook, Ariz.



Stuck in a rut?

Tired of a

dead-end job?

See the following

pages for proof

you can step up

to a high-salary

position with

prestige and security

through LaSalle

spare-time training.

◆ **MAIL CARD FOR FREE BOOKLET** ◆

ong Since You've Real Promotion?

A man may work for years at his job, and still be worth only a clerk's pay. Without special training, those hoped-for raises come in dribbles — if they come at all.

You can command a much bigger salary than you are now earning—with prestige and privileges to go with it—by getting out of the ranks of the untrained. You can become skilled in the kind of work you like—and employers will seek



As a LaSalle home-study student, you are a class of one. You set your own hours, at your own convenience.

you out. For in today's vastly expanded business activity, there are more key jobs than there are trained men to fill them.

Without interfering with your present work — and by devoting only a little of your spare time — you can prepare rapidly for the opportunity of your choice through LaSalle home study. The cost is remarkably low.

LaSalle has been an acknowledged leader in home education

for more than half a century. It has provided top-grade training in business, high school and technical subjects to over 1,000,000 ambitious men and women.



Individual correction and guidance. Your instructors give your work their personal attention.

More than 5,500 Certified Public Accountants have trained with LaSalle. LaSalle's famed Law Library, especially prepared for its own law course, is a standard and authoritative reference source of information on law. And LaSalle has earned similar distinctions in all its other schools. Its distinguished faculty includes some of the country's foremost practicing specialists and instructors. That's why your training is in experienced hands... why your LaSalle diploma will be a credential that is respected by employers.

To get full information, mail postcard on facing page for free booklet. No stamp is needed. LaSalle, 417 South Dearborn, Chicago, Illinois, 60605.

**Send for free booklet that
may change your future**

Mailing the card below may be the first step in qualifying for a more important job and higher pay. Simply check the program in which you are most interested, and we will send you a valuable free booklet, with full information on opportunities in that field.



MAIL CARD FOR FREE BOOKLET

ting to know your way about now on the farm. Young and strong you are. No need to waste your time on piddling little jobs. I can do with a man working harder than you, and harder you can work."

My father had stopped being pleasant and amused, and the words shot out of his mouth as hard and fast as dried peas falling on a tin plate.

"Oh, Father!" I exclaimed, without thinking.

He looked at me sharply. "Well?"

I was embarrassed then, and didn't know what to say. "Nothing," I mumbled.

He turned back to Scarecrow. "You see? Clever girl, eh? Great Talker. Always knows what she wants to say. Puts her thoughts into words like a schoolmistress."

My father often mocked me, and I was used to it. But I didn't like him to do it in front of Scarecrow, and I was stung into saying what I had realized was unwise. "It's just that—that I think Scarecrow's got enough to do."

"Oh, indeed? No doubt you've a wonderful knowledge what a man's capable of. No doubt you've been grieving in secret that your poor father has to work sixteen and seventeen hours a day, and him not a young man any more. It must have fair broken your heart. Did it?" He leaned towards me and repeated, much more loudly, "Did it?"

I shrank back, afraid. His shouting, blustering manner almost paralyzed me, but even more I feared what he might do. One day he would carry out his threat to give me a good hiding, I was sure. All my life I had been dreading it, and now my mother was gone I felt it coming closer. In her lifetime it had been like watching a maddened bull over a gate, but now the gate was open. I wasn't certain why the prospect of a good hiding filled me with such horror. I wasn't even certain what, exactly, a good hiding was, but in my mind it was associated with the depths of shame and agony.

"Lost your tongue?" he asked.

I had. There did not seem any way to make the sound of words, even if I could have thought of the words to speak.

"Answer me!" he yelled, thumping the table and making the knives and forks and plates jump up and down in a queer, clattering dance.

I glanced at Scarecrow, but he wasn't looking. He didn't even appear to be listening.

My father caught my wrist, so that I could not move away, and brought his face so close to mine that it almost touched me. His brown teeth were like fangs, and the strong smell of his breath was suffocating. "Will you speak when I tell you to!" He said this softly, but the softness was more terrible than his shouting. I felt sick with the fear of doing something disgraceful in front of Scarecrow. Several times, when I was quite a big girl, my father's anger had caused me to lose control and wet my knickers, and I had never got over the nightmare shame of it, nor the degradation I suffered from the mockery of my brothers and sisters, who had seen me do it.

Mercifully I found my voice. Always I found my voice in the end, but I knew, just as if someone had told me, that one day I should not find my voice, and then I should do something terrible.

"Yes, Father," I whispered. It wasn't an answer to anything he had asked, but it didn't matter. I had spoken. That was sufficient.

He released me, and leaned back in his chair, satisfied. "Mr. Scarecrow and I are good friends. We understand one another. Don't we?"

Scarecrow looked up. "Yes," he said, without any kind of expression at all.

"He knows that I know what's best for him, and he'll do the work I tell him. So you mind your own business, girl. And he'll mind his." My father spoke in a calm, almost a friendly, voice. The danger seemed to be over, and the tight knot of my muscles relaxed a little, though that made it difficult to control the trembling which seized me.

But at almost the same moment the first roll of thunder came. It was not very near, but it went on and on, long-drawn-out and evil sounding.

My father's face darkened. "Damn it!" he cried. "The weather's going to break now, with the grass cut." He sat there, brooding, thinking how nature, as usual, was against him, and how the storm had waited deliberately for him to finish mowing. It was dreadful to watch him building up his grievance against the great unseen forces, and I did not know whether to fear for him or for the universe. Sometimes I feared that a wind or a lightning flash would enter the house and strike us down, and at other times I feared my father's anger would cause the grass to shrivel and the sea to melt away. At

those times I almost hoped there was no God, because if there were a God, my father hated Him, and that was a terrible thing.

It was a relief when we separated and went to bed. Outside, the storm was working up, but inside our kitchen there were unseen feelings worse than any storm.

Thunder has always affected me strongly. I am half afraid of it, and yet it excites me. It gives me a headache, and yet it makes me feel as if I am filled with the sharp, yellow prongs it sends across the sky. I wait, tense, for something infinitely beautiful or infinitely awful to happen. It never does, yet when the storm is over I am as exhausted as if it had happened.

That night I stood by my window watching the lightning. It made my eyes ache, but I could not bear to miss it, and as I watched, the excitement mounted up and up inside me. This time I was conscious of a difference in the excitement. Usually it was vague, as vague as the sadness I felt when the owls cried, or the hunger from hearing the nightingale sing. But now it was no longer vague. It had a purpose and a direction.

I undressed, then I opened my door and listened. There was no sound from below. Softly I crept down the stairs, though there was little need for caution, for the thunder now was a banging of giant drums, and a breaking of giants' crockery, and a falling downstairs of giants.

I opened Scarecrow's door, and went in, closing the door behind me. He was lying down, but he was not asleep, for he turned on his elbow and asked, "What is it?"

"I have come," I told him.

"What do you want?"

"To get into bed with you." And I began to do so.

Immediately he slid out on the other side. He had nothing on, for the night was hot, and in any case he possessed no nightwear, but he did not seem shy. Perhaps he trusted to the darkness to hide him.

"Go away, Agnes!" he urged.

I stopped getting into bed. What was the use, when he was not there? We stood, one on either side of the bed, looking at each other, though we could see little except when the lightning flashed.

"I don't want to go away."

"You must."

"Why?"

He gave an exclamation of impatience. "If you don't know why, how can I tell you? It would take too long."

"You came into my bed, when I first made you."

"That was different. I could do you no harm then."

"What harm can you do me now?"

"A great deal of harm. What would your father say?"

"He won't know."

"That would be ungrateful, to return his kindness by deceiving him."

"He's not kind. You know he's not kind."

"Ssh! Don't speak so loudly!"

"I must, or you won't hear above the thunder. He only wants you because you work for nothing."

"Perhaps. But I get my food and my bed and—and sanctuary."

"He wasn't kind to me tonight."

"I know."

"Weren't you sorry for me?"

"I am always sorry for small creatures when they are being bullied."

"Then why didn't you tell him not to?"

"It wasn't my place to interfere."

"You mean you're afraid of him, too?"

"Not of him. Of the power he has over me."

"Because of the police?"

"Yes."

"If I were a big, strong man like you, I wouldn't be afraid of anybody. You are strong enough to be angry with people. You could kill someone, if you liked."

"Oh, hush!"

"Why are you frightened when I talk about killing people?"

"Because it is wrong to take life."

"My father enjoys taking life. He kills rabbits and birds. He calls it sport."

There was a great tearing and rending sound from the thunder immediately overhead. I was afraid at last and I moved to the end of the bed, going towards Scarecrow.

"Listen, Agnes!" he said, pleadingly, when he could be heard, "Go back to bed, there's a good girl. We'll talk tomorrow."

"That's what you always say—we'll talk tomorrow. But

we never do. You are so busy. Besides, I don't want to talk."

"What *do* you want?"

"I want to get into—"

"Yes, yes, I know!" he interrupted, *hastily*. "But that's what you can't do."

"Storms make me feel queer, like wanting something and not knowing what I want. But this time I do know."

In the darkness I heard his sigh. "I understand, Agnes. But I am no use to you. I am just a bird of passage."

"You mean you will go away when winter comes?"

"I don't know when I shall go. But even when I am here, you must forget that I'm here."

I laughed, not troubling to be careful, and he said, "Ssh!" as if he were worried.

"How can I forget you are here? I think of you all the time. You are my scarecrow."

"That's just it. I am not your scarecrow."

"Of course you are! You've forgotten."

He moved to the window. "If only it were easier to explain! If only you didn't want explanations at such awkward times!"

As he stood there, two things happened. It started to rain, lavishly, tremendously, as if Heaven had cried, "Turn on all the taps!" Also there was lightning, not a fork of it, but a vast sheet right across the sky, as if for an instant daylight had come, and in that light I saw Scarecrow. The flash lit up his naked body with a brighter than ordinary earthly light. For one second only he was utterly illuminated, but the picture was burnt on my brain for ever, and I knew I should never see anything lovelier—no, not even in the clouds or the woods or the sheltered places under the hedges. As I saw, a flame shot through me, so that I wondered whether I had been struck by lightning. But I had not been. I could move, so I went to Scarecrow and pressed my body against his, careful that there should be no chink of light between us. I felt him begin to melt against me. It was going to be like two streams when they run together. It was going to be the descent of glory from the sky to the earth. It was going to be the answer to the questions I had asked myself.

But it was not, for he put me away from him, and it seemed to me that the tearing apart of our bodies was louder than the pealing of the thunder.

CHAPTER 11

I went back to my room to the sound of the weeping of the rain, and I lay on my bed and cried for grief and longing. Always I had wondered why I had been born. To create me had seemed somehow an unnecessary effort. What was I but an eye to see the sun, an ear to hear the skylark, a skin to feel the passing of the wind? Without me sun and wind and skylark would still be there. About people I felt the same. Not one had ever really needed me. My mother, perhaps, was an exception, but even to her I soon became a useful pair of hands, a lap for nursing a superfluous baby, and in our family babies rapidly became superfluous. I did not pity myself because of my redundancy, for it seemed to me that a vast majority of the human race was in the same position. Most of them did no good and a considerable amount of harm. Get rid of them and the earth would be no worse off. It would, indeed, be cleaner, roomier, airier. But with nature it is different. Kill too many birds and you will suffer a scourge of insects. Kill too many insects and the very soil will die. Nature had arranged for everything that can happen. People make their own arrangements.

These thoughts had been with me over many years. At first they were vague, more feelings than thoughts, yet they robbed me of all importance so that it did not matter whether I learned anything at school, it did not matter trying to be bright, it did not matter that my family despised me and was ashamed of me. As I grew up, the thoughts became clearer, but they only showed me how right I had been. I had been waiting throughout childhood to be shown the reason for my existence, and I had waited in vain. Obviously, therefore, there was no reason. I had been born, I was living, I should die, and the process was of no more account than the throwing of a pebble on the beach by a wave, and the sucking back of the pebble by the next wave. It was the ultimate futility. This conclusion was not reached as easily as it may sound. I could not put it into words, though in my head were many

words I had learned from my mother's books, words I understood perfectly, even though they never managed to get past my lips. No, my philosophy—if you can call it by so grand a name—was achieved slowly and painfully. It came with human snubs and unkindnesses, with the solitude of a crowded kitchen, with despair in the dripping winter woods, and with uncomprehended yearnings in the summer meadows.

Now, in the twinkling of an eye, in a flash of lightning, philosophy was scorched and consumed. I saw it for the false, flimsy thing it was. I had created it without patience, and that was like baking bread without flour. It was bound to collapse. I saw now exactly why I had been born. The reason was as beautiful and balanced as the pattern of petals on a flower. I had been born to love Scarecrow. No longer was I a nonentity. I was as valuable as the ants and the ladybirds and the bees. Even if nothing else of importance ever happened to me, the experiment of making me live had been worthwhile because of that moment when my body touched Scarecrow's.

I was amazed that this should be the answer to my problem. It was so simple and ordinary for two bodies, male and female, of the same species to come together. It was merely a part of the progress of the seasons, of time and of change. I had watched animals mating, and watched them in their pre-mating play, yet they showed nothing of ecstasy, unless perhaps the butterflies did, but their dance was on wings, and that alone would give rapture. Now much had been made clear to me in one swift touch, and that a muffled touch, for I wore my flannelette nightgowns summer and winter, no one having given me the money for thinner ones, and my upbringing having taught me that it is not decent for a woman to go naked to bed.

I was proud. Of course I was! To find a reason where there was no reason is to grasp the world in your hand, and the reason for being is the most important of all reasons. But at the same time I was going to lose it. For hours I lay listening to the rain, then I went to sleep, and while I slept the storm dissolved, and morning came in a glitter of sunshine and wet diamonds.

At breakfast Scarecrow did not look at me. I waited on him in a mingled ache of joy and despair. I had to hold my hands back sternly from reaching out to him, and when I

passed behind him I cheated, so that I should seem to brush involuntarily against his back.

My father stared gloomily out of the window, unable to believe that the weather had had a change of heart. He was so sure his hay crop would be ruined that I think he almost wished it to be, so that he should prove himself right. When a minute cloud dimmed the sun, he said "Ha!" in an all-knowing voice. When the cloud passed on, he looked suspicious.

The grass was too wet for cutting that day, so he took the tractor for hoeing. Scarecrow had been told to deal with the lop and top of two old trees which had been felled. It was hard work in hot weather, but my father had indicated quite plainly that he must cut up a cord of the wood in three days. That is how it is estimated when cut into one-foot lengths—as three days' work for an agricultural worker, and my father was determined to get his money's worth from Scarecrow, even though he paid him no money.

I was sorry for Scarecrow, and yet it was wonderful to hear him sawing in the yard, so close to me, and to know that my father was away out of sight and could not catch us unawares, because the noise of the tractor would advertise his coming.

I hurried with the indoors work, so that I might go out and look at Scarecrow, but just as I was leaving the house he came to me.

He looked very large and solid standing in the doorway, and I was suddenly shy, as I had never been shy of him before. Before, I suppose, he had been like a part of one of my dreams, but now I was awake and he was real.

"I want to talk to you," he said.

I went towards him, and he stood aside to let me pass. But I did not go right outside. I stood in the doorway, leaning against the lintel, and he stood a little way off, where the flagstones end and the beaten earth of the yard begins. We were in the shadow of the house, and a faint, cool breeze touched us from time to time. Inside the door was the back kitchen, which is always cold, and where I collect my chilblains in the winter, but in front of us the yard shimmered with heat. My father had been criticized for being an old-fashioned farmer, for his farmyard, they said, was dirty, the dung heap was too near the house, and there were always wisps of hay and straw lying about or blowing in the wind. His cattle were despised, too, because they were milked by

hand, and were permitted to remain bespattered with their own excrement. My father merely made contemptuous noises, and went on in the way he had always done, and I must confess that though I hated and feared him, yet in this I was in agreement with him. I had seen cleaner farmyards, but ours seemed more homely to me. I liked the smell of it, and the feeling of having the animals close around me and it did not trouble me at all that I might have to step over an old sow wallowing in the mud on my way to the pump.

As I looked at the yard on this gleaming morning after the storm, it seemed to mean everything in life I had found good, and because Scarecrow was standing there, it was the perfect background for him, and he, in turn, transformed it into a fairyland. Perhaps it is queer to speak of a strongly odorous farmyard as fairyland, but I do not think fairyland is any particular place. I think it is every particular place at a certain moment.

I smiled at Scarecrow, though I could not see his face clearly because he had his back to the brilliant light. I did not speak. It was not necessary. We were together, and soon we were going to talk, but there was plenty of time.

He, however, was in a hurry. I knew he was, though I don't know how I knew. I knew, too, that he was uneasy, and that whatever he had to say, he wanted to say and get it over and be done with it.

"Agnes."

I thought he was speaking my name just for the pleasure of hearing it. Why else should he do it? I was there, in front of him, giving him all my attention. But for some reason I could not understand he wanted me to answer him, for he repeated, somewhat sharply, "Agnes!"

"Yes?" The word meant nothing, but if he liked to have me say it, I did not mind.

"About last night."

"It was a beautiful storm," I agreed.

"I don't mean the storm. I mean—when you came to my room."

He waited for me to say something, but there was nothing to say, so he was forced to go on, "You mustn't do that again."

"Why not?"

"It's not right."

I thought about this. "You mean it is sinful?"

He gave a strange sort of laugh. "Who am I to know about sin? No, Agnes, you and I are not concerned with sin. We accept it. I am only concerned with keeping things as simple as possible, and not letting anyone get hurt. We must not allow complications to set in. They would ruin everything."

"Is love a complication?" I asked.

"We are not concerned with love," he replied, harshly, "any more than we are concerned with sin."

I pressed one hand between my breasts. His words seemed to stab me there. "Because you hate me?"

"No, Agnes." He spoke more gently. "I don't hate you. How could I? You have been very good to me."

"You have been good to me, too."

"I? What have I done for you?"

"You came to life."

He scraped his feet on the ground as if he were uncomfortable about something. "That's probably the trouble. You've got the wrong idea of me."

"I've got lots of ideas," I boasted.

"You call me Scarecrow, and that's all right. It's as good a name as any other."

"It is your name."

"No."

"It must be," I insisted. "I made you, and you were a scarecrow. You were *my* scarecrow."

"No, Agnes. I'm sorry, but I am not your scarecrow."

I shook my head, disbelieving. After all, I had seen it happen with my own eyes.

"It's kinder to tell you now," he went on. "Children have to know about Santa Claus sometime or other. You wouldn't want to live in a fool's paradise, would you? Do you know what a fool's paradise is?"

"No, but I think I'd like to live there. You see," I explained, "I am a fool."

"All the very best people are fools," Scarecrow assured me. "But at this moment I want to show you reality. I want you to take your mind back to the evening when you found me. You remember it?"

"Of course!"

"I was lying on the ground, out cold. I was starving, exhausted and afraid."

"What did you fear?"

"The police."

"I'm afraid of them, too."

"They had been hunting me for hours. Oh, I know all about being hunted. I know how the animals feel, and I swear that as long as I live I'll never again chase a wild creature."

"Do you love the wild creatures?"

"No, I don't think so, but I am sorry for them. When you've been one, you understand. There's something about it which belongs only to nightmares—the twisting and turning, the knowledge that there is really no escape, the dread of the moment when you will not be able to run another step, when there will be nothing left but to turn and face them."

The telling of this was upsetting Scarecrow. I could smell the fear coming from him, and put out my hand to stop him. Why bring back this horror? I didn't want to hear. But he swept on.

"They were driving me towards the sea, away from the country where I stood a chance. There was practically no cover, only the open Downs, where a man shows up like a fly on a ceiling. They had dogs."

"I know. I saw them."

"There could only be one end to it, of course. I was almost resigned. At least, I thought I was, but somehow my legs kept on taking me along, so I suppose they had not despaired, even if I had. Still, I must have been nearly finished, because I caught myself thinking that to lie down and be able to breathe normally, and perhaps drink a glass of water, was more important than all the freedom men had ever died for. I told my legs they must stop. Twenty more paces, I said, then no nonsense. I counted. I closed my eyes to count more easily, and when I opened them, there was your little wood!"

"Round here," I said, proudly, "there is no other wood so near to the sea."

"It was like an answer to prayer, only I had not been praying. How could I pray? I went through that wood. I did not stop in it, though I had an almost uncontrollable desire to fling myself down on those old dead leaves, and wait. But I ran through. Then I saw the cornfield, and your scarecrow. Here, indeed, was a possibility. I didn't know whether I should have the strength, but I had. I think perhaps we always have the strength when it is required that we shall. I tore the clothes from that dummy: It even had boots, bless you! There had to be boots, you see, because of the dogs."

I nodded, though I did not see.

"Do you know what happened to the barrel and the pumpkin and the sawdust arms and legs?"

"They changed into you."

"No, Agnes. There was a dew pond. That was another wonder among all those wonders, a miraculous dew pond, the pond which never goes dry. I waded into it, with the scarecrow body. I left my own clothes in it, weighted down by the barrel and the pumpkin. Then I came out and turned myself into your scarecrow."

"Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes! I went and stood exactly where the scarecrow had been. I was too tired to lift my arms, but I lifted them and held them level with my shoulders. I told you men had died for freedom, didn't I? Well, they have been tortured for it, too. I suffered torture then, but it didn't matter. As long as tortures are invented, there will be men to suffer them. The police came. They were already swelling with victory. The wood was so obvious. I simply had to be there. They went through it and through it again. They trampled it and kicked it and shook it. They explored its every secret. They peeped behind leaves and poked at rabbit holes. They forgot they were looking for a man, and searched places where only a louse could hide. And as they met failure upon failure, they deflated angrily. The dogs were more sensible. It was some time since they had lost both scent and interest. But they were working by instinct, whereas the police were deducing from logic. Logic told them I should be there, so they went on searching while I stood watching them, in full view. It was blatant, imbecile, bizarre. That was why it succeeded. The hunted looks on peacefully at the frenzy of the hunters. What do you think of that, Agnes?"

I did not think anything. I was dizzy, and there was a hot pain behind my eyes.

"At last they were forced to give up," Scarecrow said. "They crossed the cornfield, keeping close to the hedge, not to injure the young corn. I'll give them their due there. Between me and them was no more than some rows of sprouting wheat, yet they did not cast so much as a gesture or a joke in my direction. I must indeed have been a veritable scarecrow."

"You were a good scarecrow. The corn is thick."

"They reached the track beside the fields, and that is where they must have met you. The voices died away, but still I

stood there. I dared not move. I had no guarantee that I was unwatched, and my only insurance was stillness and identification with landscape. After an eternity the sun set, and it began to grow dusk. Yet still I stood. I think I was paralyzed by then, unable to move. Certainly I was unable to think. I knew I was waiting for darkness. But I believe darkness came upon me before it came upon the earth. I was conscious of nothing until I felt your fingers on my face."

I put my hands to my swimming head and pressed hard. "That was an interesting story, Scarecrow. But it's not true."

"It is true, and you must believe it. It would do you harm to clutch that fantasy too long. I will take you to the dew pond and show you the things in it. I was going to leave them there, but now the police have returned I must get them out and destroy them. When you see the things, Agnes, you will know I am not your scarecrow, won't you?"

"Yes," I whispered. But I knew already. He had told me, and what he said I had to believe.

"When you realize I am not your scarecrow, you will understand you have no—" he hesitated, as if he could not find the word "—no lien on me. I don't suppose that conveys anything to you, Agnes, but I don't know how else to put it." He sighed, and moved closer, speaking as if to a child, slowly and kindly. "When you thought I was your scarecrow, you felt I belonged to you, didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, now you know I am not your scarecrow. Therefore, I do not belong to you. There is nothing between us. We are separate people. Do you get that?"

"Yes, Scarecrow."

"Of course, it doesn't mean that we can't be friends. I hope we shall be friends while I am here. But anything else—I'm no good to you, Agnes, I'm no good to anyone. The police are after me."

He sounded so despairing that in spite of my own pain I had to comfort him. "The police are always after people. That is what is wrong with them."

"Yes, but not always for the same reason. You have never asked why the police are hunting me. Don't you want to know?"

"I don't mind."

"I escaped from prison."

"That is a good thing to do."

"I thought it was. Now I am not so sure. But you don't know why I was in prison."

"It doesn't matter."

"You're wrong. It does matter. Ask me why, Agnes. Ask me why they sent me to prison."

"Why?" I asked to please him.

"I murdered someone," said Scarecrow.

CHAPTER 12

I ran in and shut the door, leaving Scarecrow outside. Then I went slowly up to my room. The stairs seemed long and steep, for there was no strength left in me.

My room, close under the roof, with the sun beating down on it, was hot. I lay on the bed and closed my eyes. There wasn't even anything to think about. Scarecrow was not my scarecrow. I had not made him. I had never made anything of value or beauty. What I had made was rubbish dumped in the dew pond. So it was, and so it would always be.

I did not ponder over what he had told me about killing someone. That was no concern of mine, and I felt it was little concern of his. People are for ever killing something. What he had done in the past was finished. What he had done this very day was to kill the hope in me, and to kill hope was the worst kind of murder.

It did not occur to me that his confession might make no difference. How could it make no difference? He was a stranger now, and strangers had no use for me. The miracle of his coming to life had been the bond between us. Without it, he was no more than a man sitting at table or walking across the fields. Oh, how could I have been so foolish as to expect miracles? Miracles were not for the stupid and maladroit. To work miracles you had to be as bright as an angel, as cunning as a fox, and as bloated with words as a preacher. But words were dangerous. They betrayed you. With words Scarecrow had taken away my dreams.

Very well, then. I would turn my back on words. I would have no more to do with them. I would punish them by not uttering them.

After a time I rose and went downstairs. My father and Scarecrow were sitting eating bread and cheese, and I could see that my father was furious.

"What's the meaning of this?" he cried, when he saw me. "Why didn't you bring me my food? Am I supposed to work all day in the fields, and starve as well?"

I hung my head, and pleated the material of my skirt between my fingers, but I did not say anything.

"Answer me, girl!" commanded my father.

Why should I? I thought. Words would not help.

My father stood up. He put his hard hands on my shoulders and shook me, so that my teeth chattered and my head jerked painfully. "Why did you forget my dinner? Why? What were you doing?"

I could not look at him, or at Scarecrow.

"Lost your tongue, eh?" He put two fingers under my chin and flicked my head up, so that he could see me properly. This made me bite my tongue and the tears came into my eyes. "Dumb as well as daft. There's a fine daughter for you, Mr. Scarecrow!" He slapped first my one cheek and then the other. "Now will you talk?"

Scarecrow spoke for the first time. "Perhaps she can't help it," he said.

My father swung round to him. "Oh! And why? Why shouldn't she be able to help it?"

"Maybe she had a shock."

"What sort of a shock?"

"Could be the police, yesterday."

"She was talking all right this morning. What shock would she have since then? You know of any shock, Mr. Scarecrow?"

There was a small pause, and Scarecrow said, softly, "I don't."

"Stubborn, that's what she is. Always was. Stubborn and lazy. Trades on her foolishness to make life easy for herself. But I won't have it. D'you hear, my girl? I'll not have it. There's institutions for such as you, and none would blame me if I sent you there. Fact is, Mr. Scarecrow, my daughter Nellie and her husband would come and work for me if it wasn't for this creature here. Yes, I'd have my own flesh and

blood around me, instead of sweating with nought but a half-wit and a gaolbird."

"I'd be obliged if you wouldn't call me that, Farmer."

"I'll call you what I like while you eat my bread and I save you from the gallows."

"Perhaps in time," Scarecrow said, calmly, "the gallows may come to seem preferable, just as an institution may seem preferable to Agnes."

"Ha! Big talk!" scoffed my father. "But I didn't notice as you went out to meet the police. As for this girl here, she'll learn who's master. Institution or not, she shall speak when I tell her to."

"You can't force her."

"That's all you know, Mister. For a long time I've been saving up a thrashing for her."

Scarecrow got to his feet. He looked worried and embarrassed. "No. You can't do that."

"Indeed? And why not? I'm the girl's father. I've a right to do what I like."

"You mustn't hit a woman."

My father laughed. "Woman? You call this poor daft creature a woman? Anyway, what's so holy about women? They're made the same as men, save for a bit of this and that."

"All the same, I can't allow you to beat her."

"A perfect gentleman!" my father mocked him. "A perfect murdering gentleman."

"Never mind what I am."

"A murderer suffering from an attack of morals. Funny, ain't it?" My father dropped his bantering tone and spoke sharply, like the teeth of a steel trap. "Time some of you learnt who's master here." With a movement swift for such a heavy man, he took down his gun and pointed it at Scarecrow. "This here is loaded, and I'm a pretty middling shot. I'd as soon shoot you as not, Mr. Scarecrow, and I'd get off without a stain on my character. Who's to blame an old farmer protecting himself and his farm and his poor weak daughter from a desperate criminal?"

Scarecrow didn't reply and my father nudged me hard with his elbow. "Go to the stable, girl, and fetch my whip."

"Agnes! Speak!" Scarecrow begged. "Don't let him do this! He only wants you to say something."

But I could not. I do not know whether it was some illness

of the mind which was upon me, or whether it was a deep obstinacy and pride. I only knew that there was more life in my feet than in my tongue, and that it was easier for me to fetch the whip than to give my father victory over me.

The whip was one he had used on the horses before he sold them and bought the tractor. It was heavy, because to my father a whip was a punishment, and he was generous with his punishments. For some time it had not been used, because a tractor cannot feel pain. I have often thought that my father's temper worsened after the first time the tractor let him down and he stared at it, helpless, his anger turning inward, while the jumble of metal seemed to laugh at him.

He took the whip from me and laid down his gun, close at hand, then flung me on the floor, on my face, and beat me. I could not see what was happening, but I knew that Scarecrow started forward and that my father lashed him across the face. Scarecrow was quiet then, but my father swore all the time as the whip rose and fell. He swore loudly and lustily, as though the act of thrashing me must voice its pleasure. And his voice was the only one heard, for Scarecrow was silent, and so was I. In that red forest of pain I made no outcry. It was not that I was brave. I was dumb, and at that moment I could have died without speaking.

When my father had finished, he dragged me to my feet and held me, because I could not stand alone. He looked exhausted, but, at the same time, refreshed, younger, more like the days when my mother had been alive. He looked, I realized suddenly, like a man who had had sexual satisfaction.

Scarecrow was standing behind the kitchen table. There was a scarlet weal across his face, and blood on his chin, running down from his lip where he had bitten it. He was very still and without expression, so that one could not tell what he was thinking.

My father threw me across his shoulder and carried me up to my room, where he tossed me roughly on the bed. I almost screamed then, as my torn back touched the solid surface, but my dumbness was my friend, and I rolled over and buried my face in the pillow, and prayed I might suffocate.

I don't know how the hours went by, but I think I wandered in and out of consciousness, for sometimes the pain was there, and sometimes it was mercifully far away. Once someone came and removed my clothes and bathed the ugly red

stripes where in places the flesh was torn. I did not know until afterwards that this was Scarecrow, who had crept up in the night and done what he could for me. He was troubled that he could find no soothing ointments, but his attention helped me, for soon I fell into a more natural sleep and in the morning was able to get up. The touch of my thin cotton clothes was torture, and every movement had to be made cautiously and after consulting the wishes of my back, yet somehow I got up and prepared the breakfast.

Had my father known the strong effect the beating would have on me, he would have been surprised, and I think he would have been pleased. There was a vanity in him which craved subservience from others, and it gave him a certain pleasure to have even a startled rabbit scuttle out of his way. When he had a wife and young children, his mastery was self-evident, and he did not have to labor it. True, he was a hard father, but he was not entirely inhuman. When my mother was dead, however, and his family had grown and carelessly gone away, it was difficult for him to see where his power lay. It must have seemed to him that it was fast vanishing, so he stressed it, blew it up like a balloon, and no creature was too small or too mean to be free from the dreadful honor of being his servant. I, of course, was the servant-in-chief. It is so much more satisfactory to browbeat a daughter than a heifer. Yet up to the present this had not troubled me overmuch. Naturally I had hated and feared him, but there had been no panic in my fear. I had accepted his faultfinding stoically, and had even dared, at times, to argue with him and answer him back. But now everything had changed. For years he had promised me a thrashing, and the promise had seemed no more real than the danger of the earth falling into the sun. Now he had fulfilled his promise, and had become bloated and enormous, filling all my sky. I knew—for he had proved it to me—that he could do what he liked to me. If he wished, he could beat me every day. He could even send me to an institution. His power was absolute. He was far more menacing than God. In fact, he was God. What help was any other god to me, since my father straddled my world and numbered the hairs of my head?

With this knowledge came the realization that I must never displease him. My small revolts, my little secrets, they must become things of the past. I was not brave, and even if I had been, what use was courage? When Jove holds all the thun-

derbolts, a brave man is a fool. So had I been dying I would somehow have risen to get his breakfast.

He seemed pleased to see me, though perhaps he was merely pleased with himself. I watched his face anxiously, so that I should not miss any of his commands, and he shouted at me only once, telling me to hurry. I did hurry, too, though how I did I shall never know.

For a week I could not speak, and then, suddenly, I could. My father commented, "Found your tongue again, eh?" and that was that. I said the necessary things to him, things concerning food and the farm. More I had rarely done. But still I did not speak to Scarecrow, nor he to me, except to say, "Thank you," those two forlorn and so often meaningless words.

My thoughts at that time were a jumble. Indeed, I thought as little as I could, for I was a mass of sore feelings, and like an animal I wanted to be alone and lick my sores. Of my new feelings for my father I have already spoken. They occupied much of my time and energy, for fear necessitates watchfulness, and hatred is exhausting. There still remained Scarecrow, and the soreness in my heart was all on his account. When I learned he did not belong to me, I resolved to make myself separate from him, to cut him out of my thoughts and sensations. But I discovered almost immediately that this was impossible. How can a snail live without its shell, or a chrysalis without its cocoon? If Scarecrow went away, I was certain I should die. The very knowledge that we did not belong to one another caused me to feel half dead already. There was no longer any joy in the warm, sandy soil, in the tickling of leaves on my bare flesh, in the glorious shock of cold water, or in the beauty of the hedge parsley looking like lace curtains laid along the grass verges. Most years I found joy in the wild roses, greeting them like familiar friends, the white ones, the faintly blushing ones, and the ones unashamedly pink. Most years I reveled in their delicate perfume, and picked them and put them in my hair. They did not live long, but few wild flowers do, and I have learned that happiness is like the wild flowers. Last summer, however, I looked away from the wild roses and would not recognize them. The very sight of them hurt me, because of the pain which was Scarecrow. They were like flowers meant for a funeral, and to me the whole countryside smelled like a tomb.

I do not remember how long this lasted. It cannot have been long, because when it ended, the roses were just losing their petals, and the parsley lace still swayed delicately in the breeze. It must have been no more than two or three weeks, though to me it was a stretch of time beyond measuring. It was the kind of time historians have to face when they look backwards towards the beginning of man.

I was in the rhubarb one morning, not for pleasure, but to pick the fruit for a pie. Yet there was a kind of peacefulness about it. It was thick and neglected, like a jungle. The leaves were so large that they looked foreign in an English garden, and the tops of some of them reached my shoulders. It was dim and green and cool among them. I could stoop down and shut out all the world. I could almost feel safe from my father.

That was where Scarecrow found me. I do not know how. Perhaps he had watched me go towards the rhubarb patch, or perhaps he just felt where I was, not needing eyes, as I often felt where he was. I did not see him approaching between the apple trees, past the tangled rows of peas, the rigid lettuces, and the beans already running up their sticks. I was bending down to pull a rhubarb stalk as thick as a foal's leg, and when I straightened up, he was there.

We stared at one another steadily. It was so long since either of us had tried deliberately to catch the eye of the other that we both paused, taking our bearings in a strange land. After the day when he told me that he did not belong to me, I had been careful to look away from him, not because I was angry, but because I hoped to please him by making the vain attempt to dis sever myself from him. He had looked away from me, too, though, guess as I might, I could not understand why. That was why he must explore my face, and I must explore his. Faces are undiscovered islands, shifting islands, and no face is more quickly unlearned than a loved one.

Presently Scarecrow said, "Agnes, how are you?"

And I answered, primly, "I am very well, thank you."

"Your back?"

"It has almost stopped hurting."

He looked terribly unhappy, standing there outside the rhubarb patch. He was restless, too, tense and wanting to go away, yet unable to do so until he had said what he had to say. "Why couldn't you speak, Agnes?"

"I don't know."

"Was it because of what I said to you that day, outside the door?"

"Perhaps."

"I shouldn't have said it."

"You had to, if it was true."

"No. I had no right to frighten you."

"Frighten me?"

"I must have scared you to death, poor kid! Scared you so that you couldn't talk. You don't know how badly I've been feeling about that. But I had to warn you. I had to tell you I was no good to you. If only you had let me finish, instead of rushing in and slamming the door—"

"I didn't want to hear any more."

"But I could have explained, made it sound not quite so bad."

"You couldn't make it sound any less bad." I was sure of that.

"And then, letting your father beat you, not lifting a finger to help you—"

"You had the whip on your face."

"I shouldn't have taken any notice. I should have gone in and grappled with him. I'm half his age. Oh, what a coward you must think me!"

"A coward?" I echoed, surprised. Such an idea had never crossed my mind. "He would have shot you."

"That's no excuse. I wasn't afraid of the gun."

"It is a powerful gun."

"No. It wasn't the gun. It was the police. That's where he has the upper hand, and he knows it. He can bully me, work me to death, blackmail my very soul, and I can't do a thing."

I looked round cautiously before I spoke. "It is the same with me. It says in the Bible, 'Terrible as an army with banners.' That is how my father is."

"No." Scarecrow would not admit it. "He is only a bad-tempered old man. It is we who are weak. He thrives on our fear."

"We must try to please him."

"For how long?" Scarecrow asked, desperately. "How long is this going on?"

I thought that a silly question for one as clever as Scarecrow. Everything always goes on until it finishes. That is the

law of things, but one cannot put a date to the end, except with the seasons.

"What I came for," Scarecrow continued, "was to ask you whether you would forgive me. It's a lot to expect. I've caused you so much trouble and suffering."

I frowned, puzzled. This was Scarecrow talking, but he was talking nonsense. The words coming out of his mouth should be spoken by my father. *He* had caused me suffering. *He* should crave my forgiveness. But, of course, he never would. "Forgive you?" I said. "What have you done?"

An expression of intense disappointment crossed his face. He turned to go, speaking in a false, insincere voice. "Never mind, Agnes. It's all right."

I recognized the voice. I had heard it before, many times. It came from people who were kind and who considered me not quite efficient in the head. It was their way of avoiding the explanation they thought I was not capable of assimilating. My father had never bothered to be so polite, and my brothers and sisters had delighted in making sport of me, dancing round and chanting, "Dim-witted Ag! Nothing in the bag!" Of the two I think the kind people hurt me the more.

But I would not accept it from Scarecrow. "Wait!" I cried. He looked over his shoulder. "What is it?"

"You are going away because you think I cannot understand. But I can. It is you who are stupid to ask me to forgive you."

He came back, closer, to the very edge of the rhubarb.

"What you said to me had to be said," I went on, "because it is the truth, and the truth must always be said in the end. Oh, I know I was foolish to imagine that a scarecrow could come to life, but I wanted to believe it, and when you are alone, like I am, you can make yourself believe most things. I never had anything belonging to me. The books told me I owned the whole earth, if I loved it, but they are mistaken. The birds and the animals and the insects have their own secret lives. The flowers die, when their time comes, and nothing I can do will stop them. I don't own as much as a blade of grass. I'm just allowed to look at it all, if I'm careful, like grownups show us their brooches and their bracelets when we are children. That was why it was so important for you to belong to me."

Scarecrow shook his head, as if there were bees buzzing round it. "I don't know what you're talking about."

I tried to put it very simply. "I realize now that you don't belong to me. You have your secret life, the same as the beetles and the spiders do. When you told me, it hurt. But you didn't do wrong to tell me, so I don't have to forgive you."

His eyes suddenly lighted up, and seemed to catch the reflection of the sky round their dark centers. "Is that what has been worrying you?"

"Of course!"

"But I didn't dream for a moment— That wasn't why I apologized."

"There isn't anything else to be forgiven."

"There is! I told you I had killed someone."

"I know."

"I thought you were horrified. I thought you were shocked out of speech. I thought you were frightened of me."

"Frightened of you?" That made me laugh.

"Don't you want to hear about it?"

"Not particularly. It would make you sad to remember, wouldn't it?"

"I always remember."

"Well, it would make you sad to talk of it."

"I suppose so."

"Then I don't want to hear."

He was staring at me in a sort of wonder, as if he had not seen me before, or as if I had changed from something into something else. "You don't fear me?"

"No!"

"You are not afraid I might harm you—or—even—kill you?"

I looked up. "The sun might kill me, but I am not afraid of it."

Then suddenly he was coming towards me, breasting the sea of rhubarb leaves. He caught my arms roughly, just above the elbows. There were bruises the next day, the marks of his fingers, for he lifted me right off my feet. His mouth was thirsty, and so was mine. I shuddered, and shuddered again, straining myself against him.

"Get away from her!"

The words were loud and harsh, but they had to be repeated before they reached us properly. We looked round, vaguely and dizzily, to see my father standing there. His face was almost purple, and looked horrible against his rusty hair.

Scarecrow put me a little way from him, but he had too

much sense to let go of me completely, for he knew that passion had driven the strength out of my limbs, and that for a few moments I should not be able to stand alone.

"I took you in when you were being hunted like a beast," my father said to Scarecrow. "I fed you and bedded you. There's nobody else in the county would have done that. When the police came looking for you, I lied to them. I must have been crazy to do such a thing."

My father was speaking quietly now, which frightened me more than when he shouted, for his loud anger was violent and painful, like a fierce bull, but his soft anger was cunning and deadly, like a poisonous snake.

"How do you repay me?" my father demanded. "What do you do to show your gratitude? You go and nuzzle my daughter behind my back."

Scarecrow's face was rather white. He took my hand and led me out of the rhubarb patch. "I am sorry," he said, to my father, "I shouldn't have done it. It was abusing your hospitality. Naturally you wouldn't consider me a fit person to keep company with your daughter."

"Fit person?" My father stared at him blankly, then suddenly started to laugh. My father rarely laughed, and when he did, it was usually with his lips turned inside out in a sneer. But now he bent and twisted, while deep, animal sounds came from his throat. "Fit person? Oho! That's good, that is. Mighty modest, ain't you, Mr. Scarecrow. I never looked to hear any man say as he wasn't good enough for *her*—"

"It's true," Scarecrow persisted. "I am not worthy."

"Maybe you're right, at that. Or maybe it's birds of a feather. The halt and the lame. The crooked and the dumb. But—" The mirth ran out of my father as swiftly as if he were a bucket with a hole in the bottom. His eyes sharpened, and his voice was like a knife. "But, Mr. Scarecrow, I am not concerned with you. It's *her* as I'm thinking of. She's not like other women—"

"Why should she be?" Scarecrow asked.

"—and she's not to be trusted. Not that any woman's to be trusted. Nor no man, neither. But *her* sort don't know right from wrong, and times they're more sexy than other people. Reckon it's the seasons affect them, like the animals, or maybe it's the moon. I don't know. But this I do know, I'll not have

her taken advantage of. It's bad enough keeping her. I'll not stomach her bastard as well."

Scarecrow's face was whiter than ever. "I apologized for kissing Agnes, but I don't have to hear her libeled. She's a lot saner than you are, Farmer, though that's no compliment to her."

My father took a threatening step forward. "Why, you murderous lump of dung!" I could see he wanted to fight Scarecrow, but he had no weapon with him, not even a stick, and he knew better than to tackle him with his bare hands.

"What is more," Scarecrow added, "you'd have to go a long way to find a girl so pure and innocent."

"I notice," sneered my father, "as you were doing your best to change that. Well, remember what I said. She's not for you. In fact, she's not for nobody."

"Very well, if that's how you feel. I owe you a certain amount of consideration, while I'm your guest."

My father laughed again, but not loudly. This was a sly little titter. "When you leave here, you'll be going up in the world, no doubt. You'll be Her Majesty's guest."

"That remains to be seen."

"But while you're on my farm," my father shouted suddenly, "you'll keep your hands off that girl."

"All right."

"All right!" my father mimicked him. "What does that mean? It means you'll be sniffing round her the moment my back is turned."

"I'll give you my word."

"I don't want your word. Your word's nothing to me. I'll just have to keep my eye on you. It's hard luck on a poor farmer slaving day and night to maintain a roof over his head, hard luck when he can't neither rest nor work without the fear of the carryings on which are taking place."

I spoke for the first time. "It's you that are carrying on," I said. I meant that he was grumbling overmuch. I had heard my mother use those very words. "Don't carry on so," she had said.

But my father took this as impertinence. "I carrying on!" he cried. "I that live like a monk, without sight or sound of a woman, except on market days, and that lot's so sluttish you'd hesitate to put them in the field with your ram. Damn it, girl! I've a mind to thrash you again."

"Please, no, Father!"

"But maybe there's other ways. I'll teach you to go cuddling in the rhubarb! I'll teach you to control your nasty little ways, and not be hankering all the time. Or if you must hanker, then you'll hanker for what you won't get."

"Yes, Father," I agreed, happily. I hadn't really taken in what he had said, because I was so relieved that he was not going to whip me. I bent down to pull some more rhubarb, and he grasped a handful of my hair. I gave a cry, but he did not let go. He began to walk up the garden, and I had to follow, or have my hair dragged out by the roots.

"Where are you taking me?" I gasped.

"To keep me company," he replied, with a kind of nasty good humor. "I'll be having plenty of company for a while, yours or Mr. Scarecrow's."

"Why?"

"To see what you're doing."

I understood, then, that Scarecrow and I were prisoners, and that I should have to endure my father's gaze, which ceaselessly attempted to wrest my secrets from me. I should have to make my mind a blank, and stifle the almost uncontrollable desire to relive those few moments of Scarecrow's embrace again and again and again and again.

CHAPTER 13

This last summer was a strange one. It was hotter and richer and drier than any other I remember. The grass curled more thickly round the ankles, the brambles were more prickly, the hedges denser. There were more spiders and earwigs, more butterflies, and those usually in pairs, weaving their wedding dance. There was more of everything. It was just as if summer had said, "Oh, let's give them the lot!" and stood up and emptied her lap.

After the thunderstorm there was no more rain, and the hay made well. We turned the swathes, letting the sun gild every stalk. It was put into windrows, and then we loaded it on to the wagon. During this time Scarecrow and I worked

side by side, but we spoke seldom, because my father was continually watching us.

Sometimes it does not matter, being watched. It does not matter when the watcher is tolerant and respectful and has good will. But my father's watching was an intrusion. His eyes probed and searched with malice, so that it was like being beaten with an invisible whip, and before the end of the day I was exhausted.

At first I sought comfort from small, fleeting contacts with Scarecrow, but if my bare arm so much as brushed against his, my father saw, and even if he said nothing the expression on his face was worse than words, for it was as if he saw some unholy lechery and took delight in seeing it. After a time it came about that we would go out of our way to avoid touching one another. I do not know how this affected Scarecrow, but it was torture to me, and as the summer grew hotter, my desire became fiercer, and the restraining of it would leave me trembling and bathed in sweat. At night I dreamed erotically, and my sleep gave me no rest. Night brought no surcease from shame, either, for my father locked me in my bedroom, and told me that he slept with the key under his pillow.

Many hours I spent wondering how to evade his vigilance. Night offered the only hope, for he slept heavily, and was unlikely to prowl around to discover whether I was still imprisoned. If I could only find some way to escape from my room!

At last I thought I had found the solution. With Scarecrow's help it could be accomplished, and I could scarcely wait to tell him. But I had to wait three days before I could have a word in private with him, and then it was no more than a swift exchange in passing.

I was going to the pump for water when he happened to be crossing the yard. He would have gone by without looking in my direction, but I ran to cut him off, my bucket clanking against my legs.

As I stood before him, he glanced round nervously. "Agnes! You mustn't!"

"I found a way," I whispered.

"He'll be watching us. He always is."

"You're afraid."

"I'm afraid for you."

"Never mind me."

"I do. I'm no use. I can't help you. The kindest thing is to leave you alone."

"Do you really think that's kind?"

For an instant his face softened to a great tenderness. "No, my dear. But what else is there?"

"We must see each other alone. At night."

"How?"

"The ladder in the shed. It will reach my window. Put it there for me after he is asleep."

Scarecrow hung his head, as if he were ashamed. "Don't you know that he locks my door, too?" And then he strode quickly into the house.

That seemed the end of hope, and I felt as if the good rich blood had drained out of my heart, leaving a salt and bitter water in its place. For days I dragged myself around, careless what happened. And then Old Wegg reappeared. Where he had been I did not know. I never knew. But he came back as regularly as if he had a calendar tied to the handle of his perambulator, and he always spent three days near us before moving on.

My father did not like him. Indeed, who could like so dirty and taciturn and ungrateful an old man? But my father was never rude to him, and even went so far as to make him a present of something, provided it was quite broken and useless. Perhaps my father was superstitious, feeling that to cross Old Wegg would bring him bad fortune. For there has always been something mysterious about saints and idiots and vagabonds, which all through history has caused the cruel to persecute them and the simple to reverence them. But perhaps my father was thinking only of his reputation, and did not want Wegg to carry to the other farmers the news that he was close and mean.

This time my father gave him an enamel jug which leaked, and a baking tin which was red with rust. Old Wegg examined them both closely, then with a regal gesture flung them into his perambulator. He never said, "Thank you." It was sufficient for him to accept the gifts, for if he rejected them, he did so with such silent scorn, such a contemptuous curl to his lips, that the giver felt humiliated, and so often as not would go and find something he really did not want to part with.

Wegg invariably camped in our little wood, the one next

to Scarecrow's cornfield. The blackened ring from his fire had been there as long as I could remember, and the assortment of empty tins around it had grown with the years. The police had made much of poking about among his leavings when searching for Scarecrow, and no doubt Wegg noticed his camp was disarranged, and was annoyed, for he asked me about it. He was as house-proud as a woman, and just as jealous of what he considered to be his terrain. Each time he returned he would look around suspiciously for signs of any tramp who had been trespassing.

The day after he arrived, I went to the wood to find him. My father did not know, for I was supposed to be working in the house, and he left me quite free to come and go, provided Scarecrow was right under his nose. We were both free to be alone, but not to be together.

It was after eleven in the morning, but Old Wegg was just finishing his breakfast. I think he spent the whole of his rest days in eating and sleeping, gathering strength to take to the roads again. There was a smell of bacon in the air, and he was wiping out an exceedingly dirty frying pan with pieces of bread.

I parted the branches rather nervously, and asked, "May I come in?" This, no doubt, sounds rather silly, considering his camp was not "in" at all, and that the wood belonged to my father, anyway. But Wegg possessed the kind of dignity and menace which caused children to run screaming at the sight of him. As far as we know, he never did anything wrong, but evil seemed to seep out of him like steam from a wash-house.

"What d'you want?" he muttered.

"You'll be here tonight, won't you, Mr. Wegg?"

"Yes. And tomorrow night."

"I wonder if you would do something for me."

"Why should I?"

"Well, to help me."

"Why should I help you?"

I couldn't think of any good reason, but I faltered, "People do help one another."

"Not me. I don't help nobody. And nobody helps me."

"But they give you things," I pointed out.

"That," said Wegg, waving the frying pan at me to emphasize what he was saying, "is no more than they owe me."

In fact, it's a lot less. They owe it to me on account of them having homes and jewels and motorcars, while I'm walking the roads in the cruel snow and the rain."

"Father says you don't sleep out in the winter. He says the ratepayers pay for you to go to a lovely building where you have a better bed than he has."

"Your father is a fish-faced, sour-tongued, sooty-hearted, misbegotten by-blow of Satan," Wegg observed, dispassionately.

I was interested, and rather pleased that someone else felt the same as I did. "Why?"

"He's got no conscience. Now when other people give me things, it makes 'em feel good in their consciences. But not your father. No! He's got his conscience put in upside down, so he only feels good when he's doing harm."

"If you helped me," I said, coaxingly, "it would make *your* conscience feel good, Mr. Wegg."

He looked shocked. "Good gracious, that wouldn't do at all! Oh, no! Can't afford to coddle my conscience. It'd get wishy-washy if I did that."

"This is quite easy," I assured him. "And I'd give you something."

"What?"

I leaned forward. "A pot of gooseberry jam," I whispered. I knew gooseberry jam was a weakness of his, and it was one thing I was able to give, for I usually managed to get the jam into the jars when my father was not there, and was able to hide several of them before he counted them.

Wegg looked thoughtful, as if turning the flavor over in his mind. "What would I have to do?" he asked, at last.

But before I told him, I had to be sure of one thing. "You wouldn't tell my father?"

"Secrets, eh? Seems there's plenty of secrets round here. Somebody's been messing with this pitch of mine."

"That was only the police," I told him, impatiently.

"Police? What did they want?"

"They were looking for someone."

Wegg pushed himself away from the tree trunk against which he was leaning, and sat up straight. "Who?"

"A man."

"Not that escaped convict?"

"Perhaps."

"So he was round here, eh? Maybe still is. Shouldn't be surprised if there's a reward. See him?"

"No."

Wegg stared reflectively at the dying embers of his fire. "Money. 'Tisn't often I get my hands on it."

The conversation was becoming boring, so I brought it back the way I wanted it to go. "My father beats me."

"Likely you deserve it."

"And he locks me in my bedroom."

"If all women was locked in their bedrooms, it'd save a whole lot of trouble. So long as men weren't locked in with 'em."

"I want you to come to the farm tonight, after everybody's asleep, and get the ladder from the shed and put it against my window. I'll show you which is my window and where the ladder is."

"All for a pot of jam?" Wegg asked, disgustedly.

"It's ever so sweet."

"So's my rest."

"And so firm you can cut it with a knife."

"Who is he?"

"Who?"

"The man you're going to meet."

"I never said—"

"No, but girls don't climb out of windows for other reasons."

"Please, Mr. Wegg!"

"It don't sound right to me."

"I'll find something else," I promised, desperately. "I—I'll give you a book."

"You can't flog a book for a farthing."

I cast around in my mind for any other of my few possessions which might interest Wegg. One coat. I couldn't spare that. A tam o'shanter for wearing in church. Two woollen jumpers. A serge skirt. A cotton dress, and a few rags of underclothing. There really didn't seem anything I could spare.

Then I noticed Wegg's boots, and inspiration came. My father had a pair of brown shoes, which he kept for best. They were good, stout shoes, the kind of footwear that would mean luxury to a tramp. I would steal them and give them to Wegg. Of course my father would find out, because he wore them to market, but I could pretend I knew nothing about the loss, and he would not be able to prove my guilt. In any case, I did not care. The future was safely tucked away in the future. It

could look after itself. All that mattered to me was the driving, irresistible urge to be with Scarecrow.

"How would you like a pair of beautiful shoes?" I inquired. "They have strong soles, so that you cannot feel the roughness of the road, and they are so thick that the wet cannot soak through."

I saw greed in Wegg's eyes but he was cautious, too. "Where would you get shoes like that?"

"I have them," I lied. "They belonged to my brother, but he is a soldier and far away."

"All right. I'll do it. But I want the jam and the shoes first."

During the afternoon Wegg came down to the house. I showed him the ladder, and pointed out my bedroom window. Then I put my father's shoes and my pot of jam into his hands, and he went away.

Oh, how long was the remainder of that day! The minutes crawled by, each reluctant to give way to the next. I did my chores in a daze, careless and forgetful, so that my father had to reprimand me several times. The sun went down and sat on the ground weary, but seemed in no hurry to go to bed. The birds kept up their chattering, and seemed to prolong their supptime. My father smoked his pipe, staring at nothing, and I did not know how to keep my hands still, nor my eyes from looking towards Scarecrow.

But at last it was over. The sun ducked down, in a mighty rush, all of a sudden. The birds stopped talking, except for an occasional squawk when one pushed another out of bed. The sky turned primrose and then night-blue, and the stars lit up, and the bats began to soar and dive. My father stood up and knocked out his pipe with the deliberate tapping which was usually like the hammering of doom, but which tonight was like the breaking of prison bars.

After he had locked my door, I went and stood by the window and did not move from there. Now that the time was near, I was tortured by the fear that Wegg might trick me, and, having already received his payment might fail to carry out his part of the bargain. When you employ a weasel to do your work, you expect it to act like one. If Wegg cheated me, I could do nothing. I had no means of punishing him, of obtaining my rights, and if I upbraided him, he would only laugh. Indeed I should scarcely dare to complain, for fear he might tell my father. I depended only on his sense of honor, of which I doubted the existence.

It came to me then, as I stood rigid by the open window, that Wegg intended to betray Scarecrow. I remembered what he had said about money and a reward. Yet how could he betray Scarecrow when he did not know he was here? Immediately I answered my own question. Wegg did not know that Scarecrow was here. He did not know—yet. But he could soon find out. He only had to conceal himself and watch my movements after I left my room.

At the thought there was a coldness on my forehead, where I had sweated, and where the sweat had dried. There was only one thing to do. I must leave Scarecrow alone, must ignore the ladder, or, if I did not ignore it must descend and go for a walk alone, so that Wegg spying on me, would see my escapade as no more than the whim of a half-demented girl. That way, Scarecrow would be safe, or as safe as anyone could be in my father's house. It was the one and only way, and I knew I should not take it. If the ladder came, I should go and fetch Scarecrow, even though by doing so I myself would be betraying him. I began to pray that Wegg would not come, and while I prayed, my body laughed at my mind, my ears strained to hear him, my eyes to see him, and as my left breast pressed the window frame my heart hammered at it like a woodpecker at a tree. My body knew better than I did that Wegg would come.

And he did. He made no sound crossing the grass, and only a faint scraping as he set the ladder against the wall. Then he faded away into the shadows.

I waited, not knowing why, but hoping perhaps, against whatever I possessed of sense and reason, that after a few minutes Wegg would lose interest in my intentions and would go back to the rest he so much enjoyed. It was agony to wait, but it was a relief, too, for after the moon had risen several inches in the sky I had persuaded myself that he had really gone.

The ladder was old and unpainted, with a missing rung, but I went down it as lightly and confidently as a spider launching herself on her web. And I was strong, as well as light, for I carried that ladder round to Scarecrow's window as though it had been a bunch of flowers I was taking him. When I had set it firmly, I climbed up and tapped on the glass, for the window was open at the top and closed at the bottom. There was no reply, and panic seized me. What if he slept too heavily to hear? What if I stood all night, so close to him, yet

shut out so dismally? I tapped more loudly, risking the most dreadful disaster of all, that my father might hear, and at last there was a stirring within.

Scarecrow came to the window and opened it carefully. "Agnes! What are you doing?"

"I have a ladder. You can come out."

"But—" He seemed about to make some objection, then changed his mind. "All right, I'll only be two minutes. Go down, but mind you don't fall."

I went to the bottom and held the ladder, and soon he descended. He had put on a shirt and trousers, but he had not stopped to comb his hair, and it was still ruffled with sleep. The moon shone on him, and I do not know which was the more splendid, the moon or he. I was excited, sensing that the greatest moment of my life was approaching, but this was not the hysterical excitement of my adolescence, when I used to lose control and behave strangely. There was calm beneath this storm, and no fear. But for an instant something foreign invaded this homeland I had reached. I shivered and looked round, and it was almost as if I could smell the unwholesome presence of Old Wegg.

CHAPTER 14

We walked towards the sea. I don't know why we did, unless the moon, high in the sky to the south, was pulling us. Scarecrow took my hand as we went, and for a little while we did not speak. Then he said, "How did you manage it?"

At that moment I did not want to tell him about Wegg, because I did not want to spoil this time of freedom for him, so I replied that I had climbed out my window and fetched the ladder, and, to take his mind off that, I went on, "Father has written a letter."

He laughed at the solemn and frightened tone of my voice. "Why shouldn't he? People are always writing letters."

"Not Father. He finds it difficult. He does not write unless it is very important."

"Perhaps this is important."

"Perhaps it is to an institution asking them to take me away."

"Don't be silly!"

"It's not silly," I insisted.

"Dear Agnes, you must not be haunted by such bogies. There is nothing wrong with you. They can't shut you up."

"My father will tell them I am daft."

"They won't believe him. They have doctors, clever doctors. They will know that you are good and sensible."

He had not convinced me, though I longed to be convinced. But I let him think he had, because I wanted him to be happy. We walked down the lane, past the fields and meadows, to where the tame land gave place to the wild land of the cliffs. I was glad when we reached the open spaces, for where there were trees and hedges the moonlight had cut everything into sharp patterns of silver and black, and I could feel Wegg lurked in every deep shadow.

We stood on the short, close grass looking down, beyond the ghostly chalk cliffs, and Scarecrow said, suddenly, "You've got the sea here," as if he had discovered it for the first time.

I was surprised, because although I knew, of course, that the sea was always there at the cliff edge, I scarcely ever saw it, even when I was looking at it. Now I looked hard. It was smooth like glass, and the moon had made a broad silver path right across it, going on and on out of sight, and I wished we could step down and walk along it, hand in hand as we were, away out of the world we knew and the troubles and the confusions.

"The sea is freedom," Scarecrow said, sadly.

His words changed my mind about it. I didn't want to walk on the silver path. I was jealous of it.

"Can we go down to the beach?"

"Yes. There's a path, but you have to be careful, because the chalk crumbles."

We slid and scrambled down the steep face of the cliff, and at the bottom it was all strange and different. Great white boulders lay about, with pockets of soft shingle between them. They were so white that they seemed to glow, and the shadows were blacker than those of the land above. At the edge of the water, small waves broke so softly that they made no more than a sigh.

Scarecrow turned to face me, stroking my bare arms. "How beautiful you are!"

"That is because I am dressed in moonlight."

"You are always dressed in moonlight. You are a creature of cobwebs and dreams. They shouldn't expose you to the light of common day."

I did not relish being likened to a cobweb, so I told him, "My mother said cobwebs are dirty things and should be removed."

"They are not dirty," Scarecrow assured me, "because nature sends them. Only man makes dirt."

"Yet nature sent man."

"She did, and since that day he has acquired some unpleasant habits."

He stared at the sea as if something had caught his attention. I followed his eyes, but there was nothing to be seen, so I supposed he was thinking, and I was quiet, for when one's thoughts are disturbed, it is not easy to put them back in their proper places.

When he had finished thinking, he turned and took my face between his two hands, studying it carefully and in detail, as if it were a picture or a flower. "I made such good resolutions," he said, with a kind of rueful humor. "Such restraint I had, such iron control. It wasn't difficult at first. Fear takes the edge off appetite. But there comes a time when even the shadow of the hangman cannot stem the flowing tide and the uprising sap. I think I could enjoy you, Agnes, on the very trap door of the gallows."

Deliberately he leaned forward and kissed me, but there was no fire between us, as when we were in the rhubarb. This time he sampled my lips as though they were a cup he sipped or a cake he nibbled, testing the flavor.

In some strange way this put a fear on me, and I asked, anxiously, "Do you love me?"

"Love?" he answered, in a far-off voice. "What is love?"

I knew what it was, and I tried to tell him, tripping over words, picking them up and tossing them aside, because I could not find the right ones. "It's life, part of life. No, it isn't. It's more than life. Life is a part of it. It's a lamp lighting you inside. There are bits of it in the grass, to make it grow, and in the birds, to make them sing. But the stones have none. That is why they are rough and hurt your feet. Love is lazy,

too. It is sleeping most of your life, and that is good, because if it were awake all the time, your heart would throb until it burst, and you would die. At Sunday school they told me to love God, but I couldn't love someone I can't see or hear or feel, so I just love the wind and the sun and the trees and the corn and the cabbages and the grasshoppers and things like that. I hope He won't be angry. You see, love is something you feel. When it is only in your mind, it's no more than the air, and to hold the air in your arms is emptiness."

"So that is love," Scarecrow said, in a hushed voice.

I threw back my head, and held out my arms as if I were going to fly. "It's my love for you," I cried, loudly. I could not help it, for within me the lamp was lit, and love was awake and stamping up and down, and my heart was beating against its walls as desperately as the gale-maddened sea thumps on the rocks.

Scarecrow slid his arms under my armpits and held me against him. He was warmer and more alive even than I remembered him to be. He kissed me again, and this was no sip, but deep drinking. He kissed my lips, then my eyes and my nose and the hollows behind my ears. Then he moved down to my throat, and where his lips had fastened, my flesh burned as though it had been stung by a swarm of bees.

"Why bother about love?" he muttered. "Love is a word, the same as any other. We have this."

I wanted to ask him what this was, if it were not love, but I had no opportunity, for he drew me urgently to where, between two large rocks, the shadows were deep, and there he pushed me to the ground, fiercely yet somehow gently. The pebbles were hard against my back, bruising me. There was pain all around me, and I did not know which was pain and which ecstasy. I only knew that every moment lived afterwards would be inferior, an insult, a coming down in the world. I only knew that I had found the perfect moment for death, that never again would I welcome him as now. I only knew that there was a perfect moment in life, one solitary moment, and, having reached it, I should find all other days and years merely the ticking of a clock. But when Scarecrow had finished with me, these thoughts vanished, and I lay still in a mindless joy of physical well-being. Soon I should be eager for the next time, but it would not be the same. Love had attained the summit, and fallen back breath-

less. It would not reach that height again. It would become simply a delicious habit.

By the time we stirred, the moon had gone behind the cliffs, and while the sea still glittered, we were in darkness. I turned to Scarecrow, but though he kissed me and his hands were loving, he would not be roused. "Not again," he said. "Not now."

I asked him why, for it seemed to me that since this might be the only night we should have together, we must try to crowd into it the love of a lifetime. But his thoughts were away worrying over practical things. "How shall we get back to our rooms?"

"With the ladder."

"Then who will put the ladder back?"

This difficulty had not occurred to me. "There is only one way. You must go in first, because your room overlooks the yard, and my father would see the ladder as soon as he opened the door. I am over the garden, so I can leave it there, and get up early and move it."

Scarecrow considered this, and agreed, but there was still something on his mind. "Your bedroom is higher than mine. How did you climb down?"

I knew then that I should have to tell him. In any case, I had intended to do so, that he might be prepared against the danger. "It was Wegg, the old tramp. He put the ladder at my window."

He was aghast. "You told him about me?"

"No."

"Then what reason did you give him?"

"I did not give him a reason. I gave him a pair of boots and a pot of gooseberry jam."

"Is he discreet, reliable?"

"No," I admitted, uneasily. "He saw that someone had been to the wood. I told him it was the police."

"You shouldn't have done that."

"It just came out. Oh, Scarecrow, I am afraid for you. He wants to find you. He thinks there may be a reward."

"So there will be." He got to his feet. "How do you know he hasn't seen us?"

"I think he has. I think he hid and watched us."

"Agnes, what have you done?"

"I had to be with you. I couldn't bear it."

"If he goes to the police—"

"I believe he will."

"I must leave here."

"No, no!" I reached out towards him through the darkness which was around us. "You mustn't go, Scarecrow. I'll think of something. I'll see Old Wegg in the morning."

"What will you tell him?"

"I'll say you are a worker from one of the other farms. I'll make up a name for you. I'll say my father does not wish me to have a lover, and so I had to creep out secretly."

"It's dreadful," Scarecrow whispered. "Waiting and not knowing. Wondering when and how the blow will fall. It wouldn't be so bad if I were going somewhere. It's the staying still, the sensation of being cornered."

"It is safer here than anywhere else."

"I doubt it. I try to persuade myself that it is, but I doubt it. I can't trust your father. He uses me for his own convenience, but as soon as there is less work—"

"There is never less work on a farm."

"And that letter he wrote—"

"Don't think about it!" I begged, though I had been troubled when I saw him laboriously forming words on a piece of paper, holding his pen far more clumsily and awkwardly than the heaviest of his farming tools. "It must have been written to one of my sisters or brothers."

A cold wind suddenly blew from the sea, and I shivered. I was filled with love and joy, but some of the glory was going down with the moon. It was not good for fear to be with us, and problems which we could not solve.

Without another word Scarecrow turned and went towards the cliff path. I followed him, and he stretched out his hand to help me. Silently we walked along the lane away from the sea, and Scarecrow kept peering from side to side, as though he suspected someone might be crouching under the hedge. Even if there had been, he could not have seen him, and all we heard were the sounds of night, the little squeaks and flutters, and the sudden, unexpected half-call of a disturbed day-bird.

The ladder was still at his window, and the unchanged appearance of the farmhouse somehow reassured me. More, its sameness elated me, for it, the strong bricks and mortar and tiles and oak beams, was monotonously unaltered, whereas I,

its slave who brushed and washed it, had passed through an experience so great that I was prouder, wiser and more beautiful because of it.

At the foot of the ladder Scarecrow took me in his arms, and I waited breathless for what he would say. I do not know what I wanted him to say, but I fancied it would be something passionate and splendid, something which would set a seal of wonder on the night. But he only said, "Poor Agnes!" and climbed the ladder.

It was not until I was in bed that the whole meaning of everything was clear to me. In waves of rapture it swept through me again and again that I belonged to Scarecrow. Tenderly I touched the body which was not mine but Scarecrow's and I knew that I should never be alone or lonely again. I could feel the blood running more swiftly in my veins, and there was harmony among my organs, so that my body felt smooth as silk, and the very act of breathing was a pleasure.

I hoped to be awake for the remainder of the short night, reliving the magnificence of fusion with Scarecrow, but so healthily weary was I, so spent with giving, that I fell asleep, and overslept, and my father found the ladder beneath my window.

CHAPTER 15

It was not necessary for me to remove the ladder, for I saw immediately from my father's face that he knew about it. There was in his expression that mingling of anger and pleasure which meant that he was about to scold me, and that he would enjoy doing so. Some people—and my father was one of them—are perverse in their feelings, and find a queer kind of happiness in what are commonly the woes of mankind. There are those who like the sensation of poverty, even when they are rich, and so they become misers. There are those who embrace sorrow or ill health, enjoying the weeping and the pain as though they were fine entertainments. But worst of all are those who make sport with anger, and are not

sincere in it, for they are the most cruel, lashing themselves into a rage not only for their own satisfaction but also to gloat over the effect it may have on their victim. Of such was my father, and I his perfect dupe, reacting to his fury in the manner calculated to afford him the greatest amusement.

And so it was that morning. I should like to be able to say that I had become miraculously brave, that Scarecrow's love had infused me with a high courage and a carelessness of consequences, so that I stood up to my father until he, amazed and impressed, collapsed and broke up like a kicked puff-ball. But it was not so. I feared him more than ever because I had more to lose, and as I stood trembling before him my fear fed his anger. I could see it, could watch his anger growing in the redness of his eyes as the quickening blood swelled the veins, in the faster flowing of his saliva which flecked the corners of his mouth, and in the tightening of the muscles of his hands. By my nervousness I was my own enemy, yet I could do nothing to control the signs.

"Ah!" my father greeted me, and it was a long-drawn-out sound, vibrating with anticipation. "So you're up at last, madam. You've deigned to honor us with your presence." By "us" my father meant himself, for Scarecrow was nowhere to be seen, and I gathered that he was already at work. "And what kept you to your bed, may I ask? Were you tired?"

I could not even nod. I could only stare at him, fascinated, as one is held by some terrifying exhibition of nature. But my father was not put off by my silence. He was used to these one-sided conversations.

"I'm not doubting you're tired. Oh, no! Your midnight goings on must be pretty exhausting." Suddenly my father abandoned his mock-courteous tone, and leaned across the table and shouted, "Who is he?"

I had not expected that question, and could think of no reply. Somehow I had expected him to realize that it must be Scarecrow, but evidently he could not work out the means by which Scarecrow could leave his room.

"Who is he?" my father repeated, thumping with his hard, hairy fist. "I'll have his name if I have to skin you alive."

"It was nobody," I mumbled.

"Nobody!" my father mocked. "You dirty, lying little slut! Did the ladder get there of its own accord? Did it walk?"

No, you can't wriggle out of this, my girl! I've proof now, proof of your filthy, fornicating ways. You've had a man, that's what you've had. Come on, now! Who is he? What's his name? Is it that tramp Wegg?"

I shuddered uncontrollably, and this added fresh fuel to my father's rage. "Ha! Finicky, are we? But not too finicky to sneak out and let any man tumble you with no more conscience than the cocks tread the hens in the poultry yard."

"I didn't!" I gasped.

"Then perhaps you can give me an explanation about that ladder."

"Someone must have put it there while I was asleep."

"Who?"

"I don't know."

"You half-witted harlot! Would you have me believe you're pure?"

"Yes, please, Father!" I stared at him imploringly, clasping my hands, trying to will him to believe me. For of course I was pure. Scarecrow's love had purified me. I was more pure than ever I had been in my life.

My father got slowly to his feet. He made a hissing sound between his teeth. "I've half a mind to find out for myself," he said.

It came to me suddenly what he meant, and a dizziness swept me. Black shapes danced in front of my eyes, obscuring the kitchen, and I clutched at the dresser so that I should not fall. I stayed very still then, trying not to breathe, trying to make myself very quiet and small, so that he would not notice me. He was just as quiet as I was, but large, towering over me, and he swayed slightly as he stood. I shall never know for certain why he refrained, whether it was some last remnant of shame within himself, or whether a lingering memory of my mother put out a restraining hand. But whatever it was, it was sufficient, for gradually he relaxed, and sat down again, and continued to upbraid me, ranting and raving at the magnitude of my sins, and then speculating as to what man could want me to the extent of lugging a ladder round from the stable.

"There's Harry Yew's son," he said, naming one of our nearest neighbors, "but he's a presentable young fellow. What would he want with a thing like you? They say

Tom Oundy has got randy since his wife died. But he wouldn't do this to me. That sow in farrow that I sold him was a fair bargain."

So he went on, considering all his acquaintances from the farms around. Not one of them seemed probable, and he was inclined to think it must have been a passing stranger. Yet how would a stranger find the ladder, and know which window would drop a female of easy virtue into his lap? My father's suspicions aroused themselves afresh. He became more insistent that I should confess the name of my lover. He reached out and drew my shrinking body towards him, holding me between his knees, so that his hands were free, and with his fingers he pinched the flesh of my arms, especially the soft part above the elbows, picking up the skin between finger and thumb, and twisting it round. I squealed and cried and begged for mercy, but I mentioned no name.

When he had grown tired of torturing me, he let me go, venting his remaining spite in a hard kick at my buttocks as I retreated. I suppose I should have been thankful that I had not been beaten, but there was only resentment in my heart as I whimpered and sniveled my way through my work. The fall from happiness to misery, from rapture to fear, from pleasure to pain, had been too abrupt. I wanted to think about Scarecrow, but I could only think of my arms, on which the dark bruises were already beginning to show.

It has never been easy for me to set my mind on practical affairs, and certainly not on more than one at a time. So that I did not get around to considering Scarecrow's danger until my own sufferings had blurred a little and begun to sink into the past. Then I remembered Old Wegg and realized that I must waste no time in seeing him and either bribing or begging him to keep my secret. I had told Scarecrow that I would deceive Wegg into believing that I had stolen out to meet some other man, not the hunted one, but I mistrusted my own powers of dissembling. Lie I could, or remain silent when necessary, but invent a likely story I could not. Wegg was as cunning as my father, and more suspicious, for he was a vagabond, without security, and only security breeds trust.

I crept out of the house, keeping in the shadow of the farm buildings, for I was not sure where my father might be, but when I reached the lane I ran, feeling suddenly that it was essential to find Wegg as quickly as possible. As I went I

turned over in my mind the possibility of producing something with which to bribe him. There was very little. Food I might manage, but I fancied he might insist on a gift more lasting. Clothes he liked, and household goods in a fit condition for selling. But what could I offer which would not be missed by my father?

I was still undecided when I reached the wood. It was a silent day, and the wood pigeons seemed to add to the silence, rather than to break it. You would not have thought there was another human being within miles. Being in the wood made me happy, as it always did. I liked the feeling of being alone and sheltered, with nothing watching me except the bright eyes of the birds and the squirrels and the rats and the mice, and theirs were kind eyes. The trees met over my head, but not so very far above it, for they are barbered by the salt winds, and though I have often longed for noble beech woods, there is always love in my heart for that brave little wood which dares to face the Channel, and which takes the gales on its head without complaint.

When I reached Wegg's encampment I saw at once that he had gone. Yet I would not believe it. He is on some short errand, I thought, he will be back. But I knew it was not so. The place was cleared, or as clear as he ever left it, and the ashes of his fire were almost cold. I sat down there and tried to figure out the reason for his departure. In his strange, wandering way he was a man of fixed habits, and he was not due to leave for another day. What had made him slink off in the early morning, or even before the night was done? My mind went round in circles, attempting to avoid the obvious, inevitable, inescapable solution, but there was no way out. The facts had to be faced. Wegg, of course, had gone to report to the police. If they believed him—and why shouldn't they?—they would soon be here. And this time, I realized, they would be more thorough in their search, because they would be acting on information, instead of making a shot in the dark.

I am not very clever. Perhaps it is true what they say, that part of my brain is warped and twisted. Certainly I get confused at times, and then a curtain falls between my brain and my tongue, so that I cannot form the words I want to say. But whatever is the matter with me, there was no muddle in my mind that morning, when I came to understand that Scarecrow was in worse danger than ever before. My thoughts

were as clever as spring water in a glass. It came to me at once what I had to do, and I was calm and ready to do it. I dare say it was a wild scheme, but Scarecrow was in a wild predicament, and there would be wild policemen to deal with.

The first problem was to separate my father from Scarecrow, so that I could tell Scarecrow what must be done. That was a real teaser, for now my father would be more reluctant than ever to leave me alone with Scarecrow, or with any man. Slowly I walked home, not noticing any of the growing things or the live creatures around me, for my eyes were turned inward, hammering at that puzzle so difficult to solve.

It was not until I prepared the midday meal that I found the answer. I made sandwiches, thick slices of bread well packed with meat and cheese, and to these fillings I added a large dose of the medicine my father took when his bowels were obstinate. I did not know whether this would work in time, but I had to risk it, and to mask the flavor I put good slices of onion.

My father made no comment on the food. Indeed, I think his sense of taste was not very keen, for always he shoveled his meals into his mouth as though they were pig swill. He never praised what I cooked for him, and to earn his blame a dish had to be completely spoilt.

That afternoon the three of us worked in the fields. I watched my father closely, and when I was beginning to despair of results, I noticed he was showing signs of discomfort. For a time he fought against it, then, muttering that he had a pain in his belly, he left us. He would go no further, I knew, than behind the hedge, but at least he would be out of hearing.

"The police will be here soon," I said to Scarecrow. "Wegg, the tramp, has gone to fetch them."

He sighed, and leaned on the hoe he was using. "Again?"

"Yes, but this is different. They know you are here, and they will search every corner. You cannot stay here."

"So I have to start my travels once more." I thought he would be pleased, but he spoke sadly, looking at me.

"No, Scarecrow. That's impossible. They have motorcars. They will be on every road. There is not anywhere for you to go."

"Then what do I do?" he asked, bitterly. "Go out and meet them?"

"No. I have thought of something. Listen carefully. My father will be back in a few moments. There is a cave on the beach. Oh, it is not really a cave, because the chalk breaks. But it is a hollow, and will give you shelter."

"People will see me."

"Why should they? There is no proper way down for many miles. It is not a beach used for holidays and swimming and fishing. It has many rocks. You must have noticed them. They are covered at high tide, and at low tide they are slimy with weed. Boats do not pass except far off. I have never seen anyone there but my sisters and brothers when they were children."

"How do I find it?"

"You go down the path that—that we took." The memory of last night made the words catch in my throat. "At the bottom you turn along the same path that the sun takes."

"To the right?"

"How do I know which is the right?" I demanded, impatiently. "But I know where the sun sets. It's over there." And I waved my arm in that direction.

"How far is it?"

That was difficult to answer, because distance on the sea and the borders of the sea is different from distance on the land. "About the length of three large fields," I assessed it. "I will bring food and a blanket after they have gone."

"When do I go?"

"Soon. Very soon."

"What will your father say?"

"He must not know anything about it. Make an excuse to him."

"What excuse?" he asked, helplessly.

"The same as my father made. Go back to the farm, take the things you use, especially your scarecrow suit and try to make your room look as if nobody has slept there. I would do it, but there may be no chance."

My father's head appeared, and then the rest of him. "Talking instead of working, the moment my back's turned."

"Having a go at teaching your ignorant daughter," Scarecrow said, with a kind of friendly insolence. "She doesn't know her right hand from her left."

This pleased my father, and put Scarecrow back into favor, for my father enjoyed hearing people criticize me. It made

him feel superior, and he would agree with them, pointing out any of my faults which they might have missed. "Pshaw! You're wasting your time. She can't be taught anything. Should have heard what her schoolteachers said. A pantomime it was, her sitting there like a ninny, with them asking her what was the capital of Paris, and her not saying a word. Never spoke she didn't. Teacher asked her in the end if she had a tongue, and she put it out at her. She had a caning for that, and a caning for something or other most days."

"Did she still go to school?"

"Yes. No good to her, but it was the law. Reckon the law wants changing in some ways."

"I'm sure it does," Scarecrow agreed, wholeheartedly.

My father gave him a sidelong glance, then continued with his own grievance. "For instance, they should let a man get rid of his kids that aren't right in the head. Soon as they're born. You don't have to keep the useless ones in a litter of animals."

"How can you tell with babies?"

My father scratched his head. "Ah! That's the unfairness of it. You can't. This girl here looked as right as rain. She was a pretty baby, too, prettiest of the lot."

I was on pins and needles during this conversation, not because I cared what they were saying about me, but because if Scarecrow were not careful he would be leaving his escape until too late. I tried to make a sign to him, but before he could see it he had taken matters into his own hands, and doubled up suddenly, groaning.

"What's the matter?" asked my father.

For a second or two Scarecrow acted as if he could not speak for pain, then he said, "A griping in my stomach."

"Funny. That's what I had. Must have been something we've eaten." He turned to me. "What did you put between that bread, girl?"

"The same as usual," I replied. "Meat and cheese and onion."

"Sure there was nothing else?"

"There wasn't anything else to put." I looked as if I was thinking, then I said. "Maybe the meat turned off a bit. It's hot enough."

Scarecrow doubled up again. "Afraid I'll—have—to leave you," he gasped.

My father nodded. "No need to go far."

Scarecrow staggered across the field, with his hands on his middle, and Father and I resumed work.

"He's a fine long time," my father grumbled, presently.

I did not answer, because I was not expected to, and to show too much interest would have looked suspicious.

My father cupped his hands round his mouth and called, putting the weight first on the beginning of the word, and then on the end, as if this would make it carry further. "SCAREcrow!" he yelled. "ScareCROW!"

There was no reply. He could as well have remained silent. Even the skylark did not interrupt its song.

"What's he doing?" demanded my father, crossly.

"Maybe he's ill."

My father snorted. "Ill! With a simple bellyache! And here's me, an old man, pops behind the hedge and back again before you can say 'Peewit!' Idling, that's what he's doing, using it as an excuse to get out of work for the rest of the day. Well, he won't. I've had enough of Mr. Gaolbird Scarecrow. If he thinks I pay him to laze about—"

"You don't pay him, Father." I was scared to say this, but I simply could not help it.

"And that's enough from you!" my father snapped. "I give him his food and his lodging, and if that's not paying him, I don't know what is. It's exactly the same as if I gave him the money, then took it back for his keep. Isn't it?" I did not answer, so he repeated in a louder voice, "Isn't it?"

"Yes, Father."

"Course it is! That's all people think about nowadays—money. Where did money ever get anybody? Look at me! I got a good farm, plenty to eat—" He broke off, trying to think of some more blessings to count, but as none occurred to him, he repeated, firmly, "—plenty to eat. I got no money to speak of. What would I want with money?"

I let him go on about the uselessness of money, which seemed to make him more irritable the more he thought about it. But at least it took his mind off Scarecrow, which was what I wanted, for every extra moment was valuable. Before long, however, he had exhausted the subject, for he was not a man to dwell upon anything at length. He then returned to fuming and fretting about Scarecrow, and at last he reached the end of his patience and restraint.

"I'm going to find that bastard," he raged, "and I'm going to give him a good hiding. He needn't think he can get away from me like he did from his prison warders. Even if I am twenty years older than him, I'll thrash him till he yells for mercy."

My father started to stride across the field, but before he had taken three steps he heard, and I heard, the cars approaching. It was not one car, this time, but several, and they seemed to be coming from different directions, rushing towards our farm as though to crush it between them.

My father looked upset. "What's that godalmighty row? Can't a man have peace and quiet on his own farm? Are they running those coach trips out here now?"

"Maybe it's the police," I ventured.

He stood alert, his head on one side, listening. "Police? Yes, that'd be it. But what do they want? Why've they come again? They didn't find anybody here before. Wonder where that fool has gone. He'll walk slapbang into 'em if he's not careful. Well, what are you waiting for, girl? We'd best go and meet 'em. It's only polite."

I followed him across the field, and as he went he talked, not bothering to turn his head. "You be careful what you say, girl."

"Yes, Father."

"You've got to tell the truth to the police, but don't you dare say anything to get me into trouble, or I'll flay the hide off you."

"Yes, Father."

"If that damned fool lets himself get caught I'm for it. In any case, I can't hide that he's been here. You'd best say nothing at all."

"Yes, Father."

"Unless, of course, they ask you questions, and then you've got to answer promptly, smartly and obediently, like as if you was in the army."

"Yes, Father."

"If I'd had more time I'd have thought up something good. They come upon you too sudden like. But you mind your p's and q's, girl!"

"Yes, Father."

"I'll have to play innocent, and hope for the best. After all," my father said, virtuously, "they can't punish you for ignorance, can they?"

I thought of all the times in my life when I had been punished for ignorance, but I said, "No, Father," dutifully.

Detective-Inspector Pennyfeather met us at the field gate. There were other men in ordinary clothes behind him, and policemen as busy as, but less good-looking than, ants. The detective's eyes were more wintry than ever. They were like the hard January frost which makes the earth come out in goose pimples, and there were sparks in them, cold sparks, as when iron wheels turn on frosty roads. He did not look at me, but at my father, and he said, "I understand you have an escaped prisoner on your farm."

CHAPTER 16

My father was a slow-thinking man, and I could tell that the detective's confident manner had confused him, for Inspector Pennyfeather did not say "Have you—" but "I understand you have—"

As for me, my one fear was that Scarecrow might still be at the farm and walk right into the arms of the police. I wanted to keep them talking here, but I did not know how to.

My father tilted his hat forward and scratched the back of his head. "Now whatever gave you that idea?"

"Never mind!" said the detective, curtly. "I'm asking you to tell us where he is."

"I've not seen a convict, though I've been looking around ever since last time you came. I'm scared of robbers and suchlike, what with being an old man with nobbut a daft daughter for company, and my stock to worry about keeping safe."

"It will be better for you to give him up. Do you know the penalty for harboring escaped prisoners?"

"Oh, I wouldn't do that," my father assured him, hastily and fervently.

The detective turned to the police. "Make a ring around the farm. Search the fields, hayricks and everything. We'll go to the house."

My father was sweating, and not only from the sun. He hesitated, and looked about him worriedly. "Come on!" commanded Inspector Pennyfeather.

"Shall—shall the girl run on ahead?" faltered my father. "What for?"

"Well, to open the door, like."

"We will go together. We can open the door ourselves."

The inspector spoke pleasantly, but there was a grimness behind his words, and the skin of his face seemed to stretch more tightly than ever over his bones.

There was another police car outside the house, with two more policemen and another detective. There were so many of them I found myself going hot and dizzy. How could Scarecrow hope to escape such an army of uniforms? How could he hide from those clever, prying eyes? Suddenly I found myself wanting to tell them about the cave. I wanted to shout it out, because I could feel them willing me to do so, and I had to put my fist to my mouth and bite hard on my fingers to keep back the words.

Mr. Pennyfeather made me go round the house with him, and he kept looking hard at me, waiting for me to give up my secret.

I almost did so. "This is Scarecrow's room," I said, without thinking.

"Scarecrow? Who is Scarecrow?"

My father, who had been tagging along behind, heard, and laughed uneasily. "She makes up scarecrows for me. You know, to keep the birds off."

The detective looked round the room carefully, but there was nothing to show it had been used. The bedcover was smooth and flat. The mat on the floor was straight and uncreased. On the wall "God Watcheth" as usual, and the sunlight came through the window and lay in neat, tidy bars. My heart leapt with relief, and settled back into a steady beat.

While we were in the house, the other detective and the policemen had searched the shed and stables, and those from the further car had been all round the fields and along the lanes. For all I knew they might have been to the edge of the cliff, and if they had walked along to the right place, they might have seen my path leading down the cliff face. But even if they had, even if they had chalk-marked their smart blue uniforms by scrambling down it, what would they have

found? What but bare stones and wiry grass and screaming gulls and a vast stretch of water? What hospitality could such a place offer a fugitive in need of food and shelter?

No, I was not afraid of Scarecrow being found, but very much I feared the blue-eyed detective, who, when he had finished hunting Scarecrow, sat down at the kitchen table as though he were just beginning.

"I have definite information," he told my father, "that a man answering to the description of the prisoner was seen on your farm. Now who have you had here?"

"Nobody," my father replied, promptly. He was feeling more at ease now that the search had revealed nothing. "I work alone, and a damn sight too hard I work. Another man would have his own flesh and blood helping him. Fine thanks it is when you've brought up a family, and not one will lift a finger to relieve your labor. No, not a soul has been near me." He spoke confidently because he could not know it was Wegg who had informed the police. Nor could he know what Wegg had seen.

"That's strange," said Mr. Pennyfeather, mildly, "for only last night a man climbed out of a window of this house, and down a ladder conveniently placed."

Only last night! Was it really only last night that Scarecrow had taken me for himself? It seemed a long time ago, so long that I was glad to be reminded of it, and a pleasing warmth stole through me.

But this happy sensation was soon dispelled by sight of my father's face. He was staring at me in fury and disbelief, disbelief that I should be crafty enough to cheat him, and fury because he did not believe his own disbelief.

The detective was clever, but he knew nothing of the things between my father and me—the storms, the hatred, the brutality, and he read my father's expression as one of mere astonishment. "You seem surprised."

My father pointed a shaking finger at me. "It's her," he declared. "She's not only daft but wanton as well. Sniffing after a man like a bitch in season, she is. That's who harbored your prisoner. Wild and disobedient she is, and as cunning as a vixen. I've tried to beat it out of her, but it sticks like a burr."

"You mean you think she sheltered this man without your knowledge?"

"Ask her!" shouted my father. "Ask her!"

At first to hear my father accusing me and to see him pointing at me filled me with a sick horror. Cruel he had been to me, and unloving, but this was different. He was not the only father to be harsh, but this was not the same. This was blood turning against its brother blood. This was the tree denying its own seed. There was something dark and terrible about it. It proved that I was utterly alone, without protection, like the ivy when the wall is taken away.

Yet after a few moments I saw that, dreadful though this was, it might be used to help Scarecrow. I thought carefully what I must say, and when I had it all planned, I realized that the detective was talking to me. "Try to remember!" he urged.

I stared at him. "What did you say?"

"This man," he said, patiently, but with his patience as thin as the edge of a sharp knife. "What does he look like?"

Dreamily and happily I described him. "He is dark, his hair and his eyes, they are both dark. I think he belongs to the night, like the owl and the bat and the nightingale. His eyebrows are bushy, and when he draws them down, they made him look fierce. His mouth looks angry, too, but he only holds it that way because he is sad. Really he is very kind."

My father gave a snort of contempt. "There's a pail of rubbish for you!"

"On the contrary," said the detective, "it's a good description. Now tell me when you first saw this man."

"I don't know."

"Oh, come, now! You must know. Think about it."

"She ain't got no sense of time," my father put in.

"Well, let's put it differently. *Where* did you first see him?"

"In our wood, where Wegg camps."

"Wegg is a tramp," my father informed him.

Detective-Inspector Pennyfeather nodded. "I know. What was he doing, this man?"

"He was asleep. So I woke him up."

"What happened then? Did he intimidate you?"

"Yes. He asked could I please get him some food."

"No, no! I mean, did he frighten you, or threaten you?"

"He couldn't. He is kind."

"I see. So what did you do?"

"I fetched food."

"And you can't remember how long ago this was? Two days, three days, a week?"

"No, I can't remember."

"How many times did you take him food?"

"I can't remember that either."

"Didn't you tell your father?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I was afraid he might beat me."

My father laughed. "That shows you," he said, in an embarrassed kind of way. "The poor soul can't help it, but it shows the state of her mind, always having imaginary fears. As if I'd beat her!"

The detective ignored him. "Go on!" he said to me.

I stood up. "Go where?"

"I mean, continue your story."

"Oh! What was I saying?"

"That you did not tell your father."

"That's right."

"Didn't he miss the food?"

I gave a little smile. "I'm clever."

"Miss the food!" echoed my father. "Why, the girl's got the run of the larder. Feeds like a duchess, she does, with never a why or wherefore from me. No, I shouldn't notice the food had gone."

"When did you bring him into the house?"

I hesitated. Everything I was saying might be dangerous to Scarecrow. It was safer not to know. Yet I must not annoy this detective. I must soothe him. "Not long ago. About two nights."

"Why did you—why did he take such a risk? He must have realized, even if you didn't that it was unnecessary recklessness."

"It was because of the rain."

"But it hasn't rained for two weeks."

It appeared to me that I had made a mistake. "We thought it was going to rain. Besides, he wanted a soft bed."

"You were not afraid your father might see or hear him?"

"We went to the house while my father was in the fields."

"But supposing he were to go to that room?"

"He never goes into that room."

"Too trusting," grumbled my father. "That's me. And look how I got let down! My own daughter! I'm ashamed of her."

"You were seen," the detective went on, "to carry a ladder and set it under a certain window. Why did you do that?"

"So that Scare—so that he could get out."

"Why didn't he come down the stairs?"

"My father was in bed asleep. He might have heard him."

"Yet *you* must have come down the stairs. Weren't you afraid your father might hear you?"

This seemed unanswerable, so I remained silent.

"You see," my father shrugged. "That's how she is. All muddled. Doesn't know what she's doing half the time."

Suddenly I remembered something. "It was locked!" I exclaimed, triumphantly.

"What was?"

"The door."

"Which door?"

"The door of his room."

"Why?"

"I was afraid Father might look in."

"But you said he never entered that room."

"I was still afraid."

"Even so, it would have been simpler to unlock the door than to carry a ladder about. Surely?"

Again I had no reply, and after a moment the detective sighed and went on talking. "Well, we'll leave that. A more important point is, what did he do after he descended the ladder?"

"He said good-by."

"And then?"

"He went away."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"I don't think so."

Mr. Pennyfeather turned to my father. "I can't really spare the men, but I'll have to leave a couple if there's any chance he might come back."

I felt my mouth drop open with dismay, and I couldn't help making a queer sound without words. It would be dreadful if some of the policemen stayed to guard the farm. It would mean that they would be watching me all the time, that I should never be able to creep out carrying things like food and blankets. Scarecrow would be abandoned in the cave in his hunger and coldness. He would stay there until he died, and the big tides would come and pound on the cliff above his cave, and would slink in and lick at him, and he would become bones as white as the chalk around him. Those are pearls that

were his eyes. And little crabs running in and out of his toes.

The detective heard the sound I made, and turned to stare at me. "Yes? What is it?"

That was when I saw how to help Scarecrow, and I purposely looked as daft as I could. "South, south, eating some ham, lots of sugar and oceans of jam."

Mr. Pennyfeather raised his eyebrows, and was about to say something to my father, but suddenly his head swung round to me again. "What are you talking about?"

"It's what he told me. It's where he's gone. South for some ham."

"South? Ham? D'you mean Southampton?"

"Yes," I agreed, pleased. "He's going to find a boat there and sail right across the sea."

The detective nodded. "The ports are being watched, of course, but we'll go straight there and close in on him. That is, if she's right."

"She should be," my father said, slowly. "'Tisn't a place she's ever heard talk of, and I doubt if she could make it up."

"Very well." Mr. Pennyfeather appeared to be making ready for his departure. "In that case, there will be no need for me to leave men here. He's no reason to come back here, unless—" he stared at me "How kind to you was this man?"

"He—he spoke to me nicely."

"He would!" declared my father, pompously. "Making up to the poor innocent child just to make her feed him. I wish I could get my hands on him."

"That would have been easy last night, if you had been wakeful," the detective told him, "and just now you were calling your daughter wanton."

My father did not like the sound of that, but he kept his temper well under control when he was dealing with someone stronger than himself, someone like the police, so he said, apologetically, "I was angry with her. Fathers get anxious. But of course I didn't mean it. She's a good girl, even if she's not bright."

"He did not interfere with you?" Mr. Pennyfeather asked me.

"No. He let me do what I liked."

"I mean—" the detective frowned and looked as though he were eating something sour, "he did not make love to you or touch you in any way?"

"No!" I said, loudly.

"If you would like her examined—"

"Thank you," my father replied, hastily, "but it doesn't matter." In an unctuous voice he went on, "My little girl may be simple but she's innocent, as innocent as a little lamb."

"Those," the detective told him, "are the ones who suffer."

"Yes, but I'm not worried about her. She'd tell her old father if anything was wrong."

It seemed ages before Mr. Pennyfeather had collected his men and the two cars, and had roared away down the lane, and even when they had gone too far to be heard, my ears seemed full of the noise of them.

My father and I stood in the yard, watching the back of them, as though we were bidding farewell to friends. His face wore the expression he kept for the rare occasions when company called, which meant that he had coaxed it into a chilly geniality, like winter sunshine. But it must have been uncomfortable for him to look that way, for the moment the cars had disappeared, his face seemed to click into its usual lines.

"Good riddance to bad rubbish!" he muttered.

I clapped my hands joyfully. "They're gone!"

"Yes, and I don't want to see them again. Nor him. Where's he?"

"Gone to Southampton, like I said."

"I don't believe you."

"Why should I tell a lie?"

"Why should you do anything, you worthless baggage? It was bad enough when I knew you'd been with a man, but now that I know who he is— There isn't any shame in you, there isn't anything too low for you. Lying with a convict, a murderer! Filth with filth, and scum with scum."

This attack on me seemed so unfair that I had to protest. "Father, I didn't give you away. I took the blame. I said all along that you didn't know Scarecrow was here. You can't get into trouble now, can you?"

"No. I look like being lucky for once. But it's the last time I take a risk like that. Those police give me the colly-wobbles."

"You were lucky," I insisted, "because I kept your secret."

"Yes, and it was a miracle you didn't blab."

"It was not a miracle, Father. I knew what I was doing. I wanted to keep you out of trouble."

"Huh!"

"What will you give me for helping you?"

"This!" snarled my father, and hit me across the head with the back of his hand so hard that I staggered and almost fell.

"Yes. That's what I'll give you, and there's plenty more where those came from, you smarmy-mouthed little hypocrite!"

"But, Father—"

"It won't be long before I settle your hash once and for all.

I must have been above myself that day, for that was when I made an irretrievable mistake and paved the way for what was to follow. Or would it have happened in any case? Who can tell? Time runs on a single rail.

I looked at my father with loathing. "If you are too cruel to me," I said, "I can always tell the police the truth."

CHAPTER 17

During the evening clouds gathered, soft, spongy gray ones, and a gentle rain began to fall. My father sat smoking his pipe, and I just sat. We did not talk. That day there had been far too much talk, and even now the house rattled with the memory of it. I was waiting for bedtime, and wondering whether Scarecrow was getting wet, and whether he had found the cave, and whether his hunger had become painful to him. I was fearful, too, that my father might still lock my bedroom door. It was true that, as far as he knew, the reason for making me a prisoner had vanished, but he was a man of habit, especially when that habit was a hurt or inconvenience to anyone else. If he did lock me in, then Scarecrow would have to wait for warmth and nourishment until tomorrow, and I was not sure if he would do it. He might come out of hiding. He might even take the opportunity of going away, making a new escape for himself. The waiting and the doubt were almost too much for me, and I was exhausted before my father decided we should go to bed.

I did not undress, and I was too impatient to give him as much time as usual for getting to sleep. Nothing mattered but to get to the beach as quickly as possible. I took a blanket

from my bed and crept softly down the stairs to the larder, where I found a loaf of bread and a piece of cheese. These, with a bottle of water, I wrapped in the blanket, and was ready to start out.

It was a dim night, but not a dark one, for the moon was behind the clouds, giving a pearly glimmer. The rain was fine and warm, as if it were no more than the sweat of the summer night, and I liked the feeling of it on my face and hair. Most of the way I ran, and was breathless when I reached the cliff path, but when I was on the beach I could only go slowly, for the stones put a heaviness on my legs, pulling at me, and they were many sizes, the tiny shingly ones bogging me, the medium ones bruising my toes, and the large fallen lumps of chalk presenting a barrier of stumbling blocks. The sea and the rain did no more than whisper together, and the silence was such that a panic came upon me. I could not believe Scarecrow would be there, so I tried to run, and fell, and got up and ran and fell again. So blinded by terror was I that I went past the cave and thought that it must have disappeared, or perhaps never been there at all. Foolishly I kept on, moving as if in a nightmare, until at last I came to my senses and realized I must have gone too far. I turned back then, and walked slowly, examining every shadow at the base of the cliff, and in the end I found it.

When I reached in and felt Scarecrow there I burst into tears, and lay on the pebbles, half in and half out of the cave, my hands glorying in the warmth of him, as they had done at first time when I imagined he had changed from sawdust stuffing to living flesh.

"I'm starving!" he cried. "Have you brought some food?"

"Yes," I sobbed.

"Then for God's sake give it to me!"

I unwrapped it, and he almost snatched it from me and began devouring it. I pushed the blanket into the shelter of the rock, out of the rain, then sat up and blew my nose.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Scarecrow, his mouth full.

"I could not find the cave."

"Silly girl! You should know it better than I do. I heard you, but I didn't dare call. You might have been someone else."

"I thought you had gone."

"Well, I haven't, though heaven knows it was the longest afternoon and evening of my life. I almost began to wish myself back in prison."

"Oh, Scarecrow!"

"One has security there, anyway. Here, not even that. Why don't you come inside? You'll get wet."

I was wet, but I crawled inside. It was a small space for two persons, which I liked. So close beside one another were we that when he breathed, the movement of his ribs pressed his arm against mine.

Presently he said, "I heard the police arriving. Guess I only just got away in time."

"Yes."

"Did they stay long?"

I sighed. "It seemed for ever. They searched everywhere."

"Find any clues?"

"No. They've gone away. They do not think you are here."

"Good! Your father didn't give me away, then."

"No. He was afraid of getting into trouble."

"Now I'll have to start making plans."

"Plans?"

"Yes. For my journey."

"But, Scarecrow, you—you are not leaving me?"

He laughed indulgently, as if I had said something childishly stupid. "It would be too risky to come back to the farm."

"Oh, yes! Father would not have you again. He wishes he had never set eyes on you."

"He is probably not the only one," Scarecrow said, bitterly. "I have caused plenty of trouble. But I can hardly stay here, can I?"

"Why not?"

"When I lie down I cannot straighten my knees, and when I sit up I bump my head."

"But it's safe."

"Other places can be safe."

"No other place is safe. They are going to close in on you."

"Here?"

"No. Southampton."

"Southampton! But that's where I want to go."

"They know. They think you are on your way."

"But who told them? Agnes! Did you?"

"Yes. I had to. I had to put them off. They were going to

leave two policemen to guard the farm. I could not have come to the beach or brought you food or anything."

"I suppose not," he allowed, with a sigh.

"I did it to help you."

"I know."

"This is the safest place now," I had to keep telling him, so that he would be comforted and enjoy staying there. I sought for words which would make it seem beautiful to him.

"This is your kingdom."

He gave the laugh which meant that nothing was funny. "What a kingdom! Kings have ruled over strange realms, but none more strange than this! A rock, a strip of beach, the sea. Perhaps I'm no worse off than Napoleon, at that."

"You are better off," I assured him, though I did not understand what he meant.

"Oh, I'm grateful, Agnes. You know I am. But this can't go on for ever. Summer is almost over. It has been a strange summer, full of alarms and excursions, but there has been something magical about it, like a dream from which you wake with the feeling of someone's lips on yours, but you don't know whose lips they are."

"It has been the best summer of all," I agreed, fervently.

"But summer must always end."

"What does it matter, as long as you are here? I will bring you more blankets, lots of them, and food hot in a tin. I will run all the way so that it does not get cold."

"Oh, Agnes! Agnes!"

We sat silent for a while, I making up a fantasy that this was our home and Scarecrow my husband. If we fixed a sheet of tarpaulin on two sticks, like a roof, we could make the cave twice as large. I would collect driftwood for a fire for cooking, and we would build a barrier of boulders so that the high tides could not get at us, and at night we would snuggle down beneath our blanket, and the gale could blow itself inside out for all we cared.

"I'd be silly," Scarecrow said, at last, "to go out and throw myself into the arms of the law."

"Oh, yes!"

"After all the trouble we've taken."

"We've been clever, haven't we?"

"We have."

"Have I been clever?"

"Very clever."

I was pleased at that.

"Never mind!" he said. "I'll think of something." He said it with such an air of finality that I felt he expected me to go, and I was dismayed. While I had been sitting beside him, so closely, excitement had been mounting in me. I wanted him to love me, and I could not understand why the same idea had not occurred to him. Could it be that he rationed his mating, as we rationed our animals, that like a cow I was expected to wait until next year? If this were so, I was bitterly disappointed. I would rather run wild and mate and breed like the rabbits.

Sadly I began to crawl from the cave, but Scarecrow laughed, this time as if he were really amused, and took my face between his hands. "Poor Agnes!" he said, "Poor Agnes!" And he kissed me.

That was enough. His body wanted me, even if his mind held back. We loved, but not in the solemn, almost sacred way of the night before. The spirit of laughter had entered into us. We were gay. We fought and played and wrestled, as if love were something to be conquered, prolonging the surrender until the last possible moment, and then, and only then, did I lose my fear that Scarecrow would leave me. For in those moments Scarecrow and I became one person, and you cannot lose yourself.

CHAPTER 18

Scarecrow was right. Summer was almost over. Color had gone out of things, the grass was tired and ragged, and the nettles were shabby. In the little wood the trees looked thinner, though you could not see where any leaves had fallen, and in the field by the wood the wheat was ripe. It was not tall, because we are too near the sea and our soil is too shallow for our corn to wear an air of luxury, but it was a good, sound crop, and my father decided it was ready for cutting.

Usually harvest put him in a fairly cheerful state of mind, for he was a man who enjoyed taking from the earth, and

grudged giving. But this year he was morose. He missed Scarecrow's help, though he would not own it, and he felt himself getting older and stiffer and slower, though he would not own that either. His machinery was beginning to wear, but he could not or would not replace it, and attempted himself to do repairs which were continually breaking down. This did not improve his temper, and he found fault with everything I did, even with the way I cooked his food, which was no different from usual because I knew no other way. Yet though he grumbled, he did not beat me, and this I did not understand.

Days went by, and then a week, and then more than a week, and still Scarecrow remained on the beach. Often he talked of going, but nothing came of it. It was as if the longer he stayed there the more difficult it was to make up his mind. Sometimes he declared that he was more a captive than ever.

"Prison is only a point of view," he said. "A mathematician with a theory to prove, a poet with a poem to write, they can shut themselves in a cell and it won't be prison."

It seemed to me that he had missed a simple point. "Prison is when you can't get out," I said.

"Well, I can't get out of here. Oh, I'm sick of the sight of it all. That sea. Why did I ever think the sea meant freedom? It's the best natural fence a prison ever had, and it goes right round the island. Right round. There isn't a gap. There isn't a gate. It doesn't give a man a chance."

He talked a lot about freedom, about large continents and how they gave him a feeling of space. He talked of frontiers, hundreds of miles of them, and how they could never be completely guarded. He talked of mountains and deserts, and how a fugitive could find hope in them and be forgotten. Indeed, he talked a great deal about anything which came into his head.

"It's the boredom of the long day," he said. "Each morning I dread the horror of it. Each morning I think, 'This is the one. This is the one which will *never* end.' I nearly go out of my mind."

"Days have to end," I told him, practically, "because the sun goes down and then it gets dark."

"There's nothing to do. I go to the water's edge and throw stones into the sea."

I was alarmed. "You mustn't do that, Scarecrow. Someone might see you."

"I have to pass the time. I walk up and down till I'm sick of the pebbles under my feet. I've worn down my fingernails picking bits of chalk out of the cliff. I count stones. I look for stones with holes in. I build toy houses with stones. Agnes, can't you possibly manage to get down in the daytime?"

"No. I dare not. Father would miss me. And if he saw me walking this way—"

"I know, I know. There's nothing we can do."

"We can look forward to the night."

"Yes. We can do that."

Night was the time when we lived. It was the time when Scarecrow ate his best meals, for the food was fresh, and, daringly, I had taken to leaving a full kettle on the fire, so that it was still warm when the fire had died. From this I made tea and carried it in a tin can. It was not very good tea, not being made with boiling water, but to Scarecrow anything warm was now a luxury. As he ate, and afterwards, he would talk. Words would pour out of him, words rushing and leaping and bumping into each other in a relief of release after being chained up all day. Often I did not understand what he said, but I loved to hear his voice, and was glad that he needed me so much. When he had got rid of his words he would feel better, and he would take me into his arms, and he would feel happy then, and the troubles of the day would vanish. It was so cosy in the dark, just the two of us. It felt so right that I was sure those who wanted to separate us were wrong. Once or twice I prayed that the night might never end, but of course God did not listen to me. There were too many influential prayers from people who wanted the sunshine, and you can't please everybody.

As the time passed I began to get very tired. Most of each night was spent with Scarecrow, so that I never had more than three hours sleep, and often it was little over an hour. In the day I did my work automatically, half in a dream, and sometimes I would find myself dozing as I stood. We have no electricity on the farm, so we have to milk by hand, and this was one of my jobs. Oh, the temptation it was to sink into a lovely sleep with my head against the cow's side, and the torment of dragging myself back to wakefulness!

Of course I did not mind doing without sleep. I would have given up far more than that to be with Scarecrow. But gradually, as the days went by, I found myself becoming dull and

stupid. There are those who think that if you are not quite right in the head you are not quite right, and that's the end of it. But it is not so. The mind has its seasons, as the earth has, and at times I would feel bright and sensible, while at other times I seemed to wade through a sticky blackness. Scarecrow's coming had been a springtide to me. I had felt a clear sap rising to my head, and ideas breaking out like buds. It had been easy to think and be reasonable. I had imagined myself becoming as other people, and pride blossomed in me like flowers. But now the lack of sleep was having its effect, and I found myself growing confused and stupid again.

In all that strange mingling of fear and rapture and scheming I had forgotten the letter my father wrote, but I remembered it when one morning he said, "Prepare more food. Nellie and Fred are coming to see us today."

I knew then that he must have written them, for my sister rarely visited us, and then only when Father asked her for some definite purpose. This must be important, for it was a weekday, and Fred could not lightly leave his work.

I was not pleased they were coming. To have anyone new around the farm was a danger while Scarecrow was in hiding. But apart from that I had no desire to see them. Nellie had never been a friend of mine. She looked down on me, and was ashamed for people to know I was her sister. I had not been to her home, because she had not asked me, so I do not know what it was like. I do not even know whether she was happy with Fred. I could not have been, but, then, I am no judge.

They came by bus and walked up from the crossroads. This surprised me, for last time they had driven in a small car, and Fred had been angry because when he left it in the yard the sow scratched her back on it, and he said she had dented it. Also, one of the hens had laid an egg on the seat, and Nellie had sat on it without noticing. I thought perhaps they had left it behind because our yard was not clean enough for it.

Nellie was wearing high-heeled shoes, to show that she lived in a town and was superior, so when she arrived her feet ached and she was hot and cross. She is really very pretty when she is not cross, and she has wonderful clothes. That day she was wearing a hat like a basket, trimmed with flowers which looked almost real from a long way off, and she had a coat the color of cornflowers, and a dress with patterns all over it, and when you looked closely you saw that the pattern

was made of pictures of airplanes. It was all very new and marvelous. There are many things one does not see on farms. Fred looked as ugly as usual. He is round-shouldered and has sly eyes.

The first thing my father said was, "Where's your car?"

"Sold it," Nellie replied, sulkily. "Fred's lost his job."

I thought my father would be angry. He usually was when he heard that anyone was in trouble, because he was afraid they might want to borrow money from him. But to my surprise he looked pleased now, and rubbed his hands together.

I gave them their dinner, which Fred wolfed as if he hadn't had a meal for months, but which Nellie scarcely touched.

"Potatoes?" she said. "Don't be silly! I never eat those things. They make you as fat as a pig."

I could not understand this, because I almost lived on them, they being cheaper than anything since I did not make my own bread. Perhaps town potatoes were different. "I am not fat," I pointed out.

"Oh, you!" Nellie said, as if that explained everything. But it left me mystified.

I took the dishes from the table, and the plates and knives and forks, and washed and dried them. My father and Nellie and Fred were still sitting in the kitchen, and I hesitated, wondering whether I should join them.

"Haven't you got any work to do?" asked my father.

He knew I had, because there was always work. It was just his way of ordering me to go and do it.

The vegetable garden was usually in a more or less neglected state, because although it helped to feed us, it was, in my father's eyes, inferior to the fields and the stock and almost everything else connected with the farm. Therefore it was tended only when the more vital work was done, which meant that it was tended hurriedly and spasmodically. Today, I thought, I would pull up the bittersweet which was growing with the beans, and the chickweed and groundsel that made vivid patches of green amidst the late summer yellow of the surrounding grass. I walked across the yard to fetch a large basket from one of the sheds, and began to go towards the garden.

But something made me stop. I do not know what it was. It was not exactly a thought. It was more of a feeling. I stood there, scratching my leg with the heel of my shoe, then I put the basket down and turned and went back.

I could not be seen from the kitchen window and I took care not to be heard as I crept into the house and pressed myself against the door. I could hear every word they were saying.

"Of course we'd like to come." Nellie's voice had a whine in it, as though she bore a grievance against life. She had always been the same, and I knew she considered she should be wealthy and looked up to, and felt she had been cheated because she was not. "Things aren't easy now," she went on. "I don't know how we'll manage if Fred doesn't get another job soon."

"I've tried," Fred said, defensively.

"I know you have, but you're too fussy. Want a job made to measure, you do."

"I'm damned if I'll work my guts out for the sort of wages they pay. And no prospects neither."

"I shan't live for ever," my father said, but in a tone which showed he didn't believe what he was saying. "One day this farm'll pass to somebody else. It's a good farm."

"It could be," Nellie allowed, condescendingly.

"Yes. And why isn't it now? 'Cos I ain't got no help. Course, if Fred's afraid of work—"

"He's not," Nellie flared up. "He'll work as well as anybody if it's worth his while."

"Ah!" Fred agreed. "Give me a job without a foreman."

"But I've told you again and again, Father, that I won't come while she's here."

There was silence for a moment, and even through the door I could feel there was something heavy and ominous about that silence.

My father broke it. "But if she wasn't here?"

"Where could she go?" Nellie asked, quickly.

"There are places."

"What d'you mean?"

"It's not right or fitting she should be here. She needs taking care of."

"Why? What has she done?"

"Well, she's not dependable. There's no end of little things. Besides, she's a danger to herself."

"How?"

"Have to lock her in her room at night. And then she climbs out of the window and goes off with men."

"No!" In that one syllable Nellie expressed outrage and

incredulity and delighted curiosity. I could almost see her licking her lips.

"Well!" That was Fred, not trying to hide his salacious amusement. "Who'd have thought it! Such a goody-goody look she's got, too! They say the quiet ones are the worst."

"What man would bother with *her*?" Nellie demanded, contemptuously.

"Never mind!" My father did not want them to know about Scarecrow, and in any case he would not have satisfied their curiosity, because he did not like satisfying anyone. "I'm telling you so you can see I've reason for doing what I'm going to do."

"Will you ever get her certified?"

"Don't have to. I'm not sending her to an asylum."

"Oh! I thought you meant—"

"No. It'll be a mental home. That's where you go to have your mind made well."

"But I don't want her made well. D'you think I'm going to sell up my house and leave my friends and tear up my roots—" I don't suppose my father was impressed. Nellie had about as many roots as she had friends, otherwise she'd not be so willing to come and live on the farm. "—change my whole life, only to find *her* coming back just as I'm *settling* down?"

"You don't need to worry. Not everybody that goes in comes out, and I'll take care to let them know it's her lonely home life that's made her worse."

There was another silence, a different kind. If you had asked me whether my sister Nellie had a conscience, I should have replied that I thought not. But I should have been wrong. She had a conscience, even if it was in an enfeebled condition, and she was wrestling with it now, for after a few minutes she said, "Anyway, she'll be happier there than here," and this sentiment, spoken as if over a grave, spoken smugly, virtuously, as when they say, "He's gone to a better land," or "She's at peace now," or, "Dumb animals don't feel," seemed to settle the question, apart from details.

"How long will it take you to make the arrangements?" Nellie asked, as though they were planning a party or a holiday.

"Better give me a month."

"A month!" Nellie almost screamed.

"Well, you got to sell up your home. That'll take time."

Nellie dropped all pretence. "You know damn well the house isn't ours, and we might as well leave our few sticks of furniture in lieu of rent, which we haven't paid for two weeks."

"It's got to be done properly. Can't have people saying we're getting rid of the girl to suit our own convenience. Next week, when I go to market, I'll see the doctor and tell him how she's worsening and how distressing it is. Then he'll have to come out and examine her."

"Suppose," Nellie asked, shrewdly, "she talks to him kind of sensible, like she might, and he reckons she's not bad enough to be put away?"

"When I've told him all I'm going to tell him," said my father, "he'll not reckon anything like that. Doesn't a girl's father, what's with her all the time, know more than a doctor that sees her for a few moments?"

"Very well. We'll come in a month."

"About that. Better wait till I write and let you know."

"Pity we couldn't have come sooner."

My father snorted. "Darn lucky you are to be coming at all. If it wasn't for me thinking things out—"

"Well, I don't know how we're going to manage. If you could lend us some money—"

My father laughed loudly. "Have you ever known me to lend money?"

"No. I haven't."

"Then don't talk daft, or I'll think you're as bad as your sister!"

I went away quickly, because I felt that the conversation was over. I went away down the garden and lay among the runner beans, between the double row. Over my head the sticks met and crossed and the horizontal bar ran between them. They looked rather like the roof of a church. Beneath me and all around me was the green, veiling jungle of the bean plants and the weeds. I was quite alone.

For a time I shivered, though it was a hot afternoon, and then, as the full meaning of that conversation swept through me, I writhed and shuddered in a paroxysm of terror that was like a dreadful travesty of love's orgasm. Almost an hour must have passed before I was able to think with any coherence.

It was not entirely surprising that my father should con-

template sending me to a home for the insane. He had threatened it often enough, but his threats had seemed no more real than the threat of snow on rose petals, or the threat of a shroud to the satin skin of youth. Now the shadow had become substance, and he was going to do it. I knew that having announced his intention to Nellie and Fred, he would keep his word. I knew that for years he had been seeking for an opportunity to do this very thing, so that Nellie would keep house for him, and Fred help with the farm. I knew that Scarecrow's coming had hastened matters, and that my own threat to betray my father to the police had added the final touch which completed the pattern. What I did not know was how I could avoid that horrible fate.

I lay and fought the inevitable. My head ached, and I rubbed it on the earth among the weeds. I could run away. But where could I go? And how then could I, a fugitive, help the fugitive Scarecrow? Together, we should be sitting ducks for the police. I could tell the doctor what my father planned, tell him it was all a plot conceived by a spiteful old man who did not care whom he sacrificed for his own comfort and convenience. But would the doctor believe me? Would he not, primed by my father, imagine, rather, that I was raving, that my sick mind fed itself on the fancy of nonexistent persecution? Would he not look upon my complaints as further proof of my insanity? Indeed in that direction I could look for no help. What, then? Submit tamely? Allow myself to be shut away until I really did go mad, until my brain, which had never been strong, gave up the battle and slipped away into the twilight where no effort would have to be made, where nothing would be expected of it? In that time of agony it seemed to me that I was saner than ever before, that once I had faced the horror and looked it full in the eyes, my confusion was wiped out and I was able to think clearly and logically. Like the pages of a book the thoughts passed through my mind in good order. I could foresee all eventualities and assess my chances. But my chances were nil, and the one thing I could not see was a way of escape. In despair I rested my arms on my knees and bowed my head on to my arms and wept.

Yet when I returned to the house I was calm. There was nothing unusual about me except the pink rims to my eyes, and no one looked closely enough at me to notice such a de-

tail. I made tea for Nellie and Fred, and filled their cups for them several times. I even went into the yard to see them on their way, as though they had been welcome guests.

Nellie grumbled to the last, but now even her grumbling held a note of cheerful anticipation. "It's disgraceful," she said, to my father, "that a man in your position should have to walk to the main road to take a bus. My feet'll be covered in blisters by the time I get home. You should have a car."

"I got a tractor," my father replied.

"And a fat lot of good that is! As if we could go spinning through the countryside on a tractor! If you had some help, and made the farm pay better, you'd soon be able to buy a car." And she smiled meaningly.

That night as usual I went down to the beach. It was a warm night, with no moon, and the stars had the sky to themselves. With little to do except talk and make love, we had made the stars our picture book, and Scarecrow had taught me the names of some of them, and their place in the heavens, which changed as the year spun round. Once I had thought of them as cold and hard and motionless, like diamonds set in a ring on the finger of some too-huge-to-be-contemplated giant. But now it seemed they came and went, bloomed and faded like flowers, and they were my friends. Their names were strange and beautiful—Betelgeuse, Sirius, Procyon and Aldebaran, and the others which were worlds, perhaps even more beautiful than ours. Scarecrow used to make me say the names over to him, and was pleased when I remembered.

But that night I could not be interested in them. "Look how bright the stars are!" Scarecrow exclaimed. "Perfect for your astronomy lesson. If only we had a telescope!"

I tried hard, but Scarecrow noticed something was wrong. "What is the matter, Agnes?"

"Nothing," I replied. I had decided, while I lay thinking under the beams, that I would not tell him of my trouble. He had troubles enough of his own, and mine would be an added burden which would weigh him down and yet not lighten me, for I did not believe that even Scarecrow could help me here. So I said, "Nothing," and he put his arm round my shoulder, thinking, though not with vanity, that any grief of mine must be concerned with him. "I haven't gone yet, my dear. I am still with you. We still have our nights."

And so we had, though that night love was sorrow, and his kisses seemed to break my heart.

CHAPTER 19

I suppose it was inevitable that my father should find out about Scarecrow. You cannot leave and re-enter a house night after night without a sound. There is bound to come a time when a stair creaks, or when you are not quite careful enough in closing a door. Also, there was the question of the food. That had been worrying me a great deal, for Scarecrow had a pretty fair appetite, and though I ate as little as possible to try to make up for it, sooner or later my father would have noticed that I was buying more and taking more from our store. But I need not have troubled myself about this, for before he began questioning the amount we were eating, everything was over. One night he awoke and heard me passing his room and going down the stairs.

I did not know until I came from the larder, for I was busy wrapping up some cold bacon and wondering whether I dared take a whole loaf of bread again. I was hungry myself, and the smell of the food was almost more than I could bear, but I did not eat even a mouthful, because I was afraid that once I started I should not be able to stop. So with the parcels in my arms I turned and went out, and found myself looking straight into my father's face.

For a moment he did not speak, and the shock was so great to me that I stood like a fence stake, stiff and still, unable even to begin to think how I should get myself out of this predicament.

"Where are you going?" my father asked, at last.

My mouth was too dry for words to form, even if I had had anything to say. I could only run my tongue along my lips, in an effort to moisten them.

My father took the parcels from me and examined them, and what he saw seemed to give him a grim satisfaction. "Ah! No need to ask. So he's hanging round again, eh? You lied to me and you lied to the detective. You did, didn't you?"

"Southampton," I managed to say desperately and stupidly.

He gave an exclamation of disgust. "You're a bad lot. I done my best for you, but you're no good. Can't leave a man alone. Have to go crawling around him, whether he's vagabond or murderer. That's why I can't have no hired help." He began to look pleased, for he had found a reason that explained his meanness, a reason he was beginning to believe himself. "Can't have no hired help, because you're itching after anything that wears trousers. No man's safe from a creature like you. You're dangerous, and ought to be locked up."

It made me so angry to see my father putting himself right with his conscience that I forgot my fear. "I'm not like that," I said, boldly. "I don't want men, I only want Scarecrow. I love him."

"Love!" My father leered, and mouthed the word as though it were dirty. "That's the way you girls excuse your little games. Love! There's no such thing, and if there is you don't know nothing about it. You're wrong in the head. Don't you understand that yet? Your brain's twisted, and what comes out of it is deformed. Some folks has got humps on their backs, but you've got a hump on your mind."

"Scarecrow thinks I'm sensible."

"Scarecrow!" He seemed to spit out the name. "That murderer! That scum! There ain't nothing lower than what he is. You know what they'll do to him when they catch him? They'll hang him by the neck until he's dead."

"Oh, no!"

"He won't look so pretty then. He'll burst his eyeballs, and his tongue'll stick out like a great purple plum."

"Please, no!"

"He won't be so pleasant to kiss then, will he? That's the only sort of man you can find to tumble you in a ditch, and even he would think himself above you if he wasn't getting something out of it."

I stared at him. "What do you mean?"

He pointed contemptuously at the food. "That's what he goes it for. Why else should he? Isn't the world full of women longing for the embraces of a man? Fine women they are, too, right and smart in the head, all dolled up and smelling like flowers, with shapes to make your mouth water. That's the sort of woman a man goes for, so why should even he likes of him want you? Tell me that!"

"I don't know."

"Well, I do. He needed a safe place for hiding, with someone to bring food and not give him away. It was easy payment to let you have what you wanted."

My face was hot with shame. "That's not true. Scarecrow loves me." That was not true, either, I felt, even as I said it. Scarecrow had never said he loved me. I would have suffered eternal torture gladly to hear him say so, but I could not ask him. That is something which must be told willingly or not at all. It must be forced from the heart like a gush of water from the rock. So while I boasted to my father, to cover my humiliation, there was a heaviness inside me, and a fear that by claiming such a glory I had made it impossible for it ever to happen.

"Pah! A man that thinks anything of a woman doesn't get her into trouble with the police. It would be prison for you, my girl, if it wasn't for me. I'll have to tell 'em you're a poor, daft creature as didn't know what you were doing."

"The police have gone," I said. "They won't come back."

"They will when I ask them."

"Father! You mustn't!"

"Mustn't! D'you think I'm going to risk harboring him again? No, I was a fool, but I'll not be one twice. Come now, girl, take me to him."

"I won't."

"You will." He took me by the wrist and dragged me into the kitchen. "If you didn't show me, I'd soon find him."

"You wouldn't. He's hidden. You'll never think of looking where he is."

"I'll get him if I have to beat down every hedge and pull the ricks to pieces. But there's no need to waste all that time. You're going to lead me to him." He started to push me towards the door, then suddenly stopped. "No! Wait!" He went to the fireplace and lifted down his gun which hung over the chimney place. Carefully he examined it, then nodded. "Right! I'll be prepared for him. Let him try any tricks and he'll feel the bite of this."

"You wouldn't shoot him!"

"I'd shoot him as soon as look at him," my father said, earnestly. "In fact, I'd sooner shoot him than look at him, and not a word of blame would I be getting from the police, for I'd be saving them a load of trouble. Open the door, now!"

I did not move.

"Do I have to force you?"

"You can't force me."

"Can't I?"

"No." I was terribly afraid, but there was something in me which was stronger than fear. I do not know what it was, but it seemed to come from Scarecrow, or from how I felt about Scarecrow. Never before had I defied my father like this, and even now it was as if I were doing it against my will, against the shrinking of my apprehensive body. But of one thing I was sure. Nothing he could do to me would make me betray Scarecrow.

"You can beat me," I said, "but I won't tell you where he is."

"Beat you? No, I shan't do that."

"You've done it before."

"Maybe. But not now." He smiled, a wolfish kind of snarl which showed how long and yellow were his teeth. "I wouldn't like to make any bruises on your fair young body."

Suddenly I understood. "That's why you've stopped beating me. You don't want the doctor to see the marks, or he'd think you were cruel to me, and he wouldn't believe the things you told him about me."

"Doctor? What doctor?"

"I know," I cried. "I heard. You were talking to Nellie about me. You want to put me away, but I won't let you. You shan't do it!" My voice was rising to a shriek, but I could not control it. It did not seem to belong to me. It was something outside of myself, a fury that howled like the wind howls when the gales rush in from the sea. "You shan't do it! I'm not mad. I'm not different. I'm like other people."

"Shut up!" He slapped my face, but I scarcely felt it. "I tell you you're crazy. You're raving mad, and nobody's going to believe nothing else. I'll deal with that murderer, and when I've dealt with him, I'll deal with you."

"Try it!" I taunted him.

His eyes were red like those of a boar we once had. It was a bad animal, and we destroyed it after it half killed one of my brothers. "You're not only mad," he went on. "You're violent. When the doctor comes you'll be tied up. You'll have been tied up for days. I'll explain I had to do it in self-protection. See then what he says! Now will you take me to that man?"

"No."

"Then I'll make you."

"How? How can you? I won't walk a step. If you push me or drag me you won't know which way to go. There's all the countryside for miles around, and it's dark. You'll never, never find him." My triumph was so complete that I almost sang the last words. I had realized that Scarecrow was safe, at least for that night, as long as I was strong enough to protect him. And I was strong enough. I wasn't afraid any more. I stood up straight, and it seemed to me as if I were invulnerable, as if I stood with my head crowned with Sirius and Aldebaran, and my feet deep in the chalky earth, with the free waves of the sea washing about my knees.

My father put down his gun, resting it against the wall. "I won't mark you," he said. "But there's other ways."

I did not know what he meant, and I do not know now. He grasped my arm and pulled me across the kitchen. "What are you doing?" I cried. "Where are you taking me?"

"Upstairs," he answered. "More convenient there."

My courage did not vanish, but terror came in to march side by side with it. I could not guess what my father's intentions were, but something deeper than knowledge warned me, as if a flaring danger signal were red before my eyes. I fought like a wild animal, wordlessly and desperately. When I found I could not free my arm, I sank my teeth into my father's hand, and felt the flesh break and the blood spurt. He cried out and cursed and snatched his hand away, but he was not vanquished. He caught me round the middle and flung me over his shoulder. He was a strong man, but I was strong too, and he was growing old. Along the passage he carried me, his feet heavy on the stone flags. With my fists I pommeled his back, but it was like hitting a wall. I did not scream, because it would have been useless. There was no one to hear.

It was not until he climbed the stairs that my chance came. My hands found the rail, and clung to it. In vain he tried to drag me away, impeded as he was with my weight and the upward movement. For a few seconds we paused, panting, both holding, neither giving way. Yet for me this was nothing but an interval, a putting off of what must be, and I was dizzy with fury and panic and the downward-hanging position of my head. In a final effort I flung most of my weight on to my arms, giving myself leverage, and I straightened my legs and

kicked with all the strength of which I was capable. I kicked my father in the belly and in all the tender parts, surprising and hurting him. He bent forward, and I shot over his head. Had I landed on my feet, I could have got away. There would have been time to run along the passage, through the kitchen, into the back kitchen and out into the night. But I was compelled to dive headfirst, and so fell to the bottom of the stairs, almost stunning myself.

By the time I had picked myself up, he was on my heels. Along the passage I fled, and tried to shut the kitchen door in his face, but his weight against it was too much for me. There was no time to think, even if I had been in a fit state for thinking, but as I turned and rushed across the kitchen I realized that his hands would be upon me before I could open the back door. I realized, too, in that flash which came in less than an instant, that I was breathless and exhausted, almost ready to collapse. Very soon there would be no resistance in me.

I do not know how or why it happened as it happened then. Perhaps people rarely do know, for to say a thing happens is as if to blame events for moving of their own accord. What I did I am sure I did not plan to do, or even consent to let myself do it. I think my body took charge of me. The deed was done so swiftly, so ruthlessly that it could not have been my deed. I had dashed across the kitchen, running even while I was convinced there was no escape. I was almost at the far door, my father close behind me. My eyes saw the gun leaning against the wall, my legs stopped running, my arms reached out. I picked up the gun, turned, and shot my father.

I did not aim it at him. I do not remember pressing the trigger. There was a loud bang, and a kick from the gun which sent me staggering back. My father had paused abruptly. He was looking at me. I looked at him and saw that he could not really look at me, because where his face had been was only horror. It seemed an eternity before he fell.

I put down the gun carefully, because I am afraid of firearms. My father taught us when we were children that we must never touch them. I would have put it back on its hook above the fireplace, but that would have meant standing on a chair, and I was afraid I might drop the gun and it might go off.

For a while I stood gazing down at my father. I was glad he

had fallen on to his face, though it was not wise to look too closely even so. His back and legs were reassuringly familiar. I felt that I ought to do something for him, that he would be angry if I did not. Yet what could I do? He was dead, of course. Things are done for the dead, I know, but nothing on earth would have induced me to touch this dead, this dreadful figure lying on the kitchen floor.

At last I remembered Scarecrow, and wondered how I could have forgotten him. He would be hungry and worried, for he had become good at reading the time by the stars, and would know that I was later than usual.

I went to the larder and picked up the food my father had taken from me. I stepped very softly, so as not to awaken him, and it was only when I returned to the kitchen and saw him on the floor that I realized I need be quiet no longer. If I danced or sang, or cried like the owls, or barked like the foxes, he would still sleep. It was a strange thought, and I ran out quickly, afraid that I might put it to the test and frighten myself with my own noise.

I ran all the way to the cliff edge, and as I left the farm behind me it seemed that what had happened could not have happened. I climbed down the cliff path slowly, because it was difficult to find my way in the dark, and one wrong step would have sent me crashing on to the beach. There was a breeze from the southwest that night. It was quite a stiff breeze, for the waves were rearing up like ghostly white horses. You could hear their hooves as they galloped over the pebbles. I loved the wind when it was like that, and the sea when it was like that. The wind pulled at my skirt and got in my hair, and the memory of my father got pushed back, like dreams get pushed back every morning, into a dusty corner of my mind.

Scarecrow was there. I do not know what I should have done if he had not been there. By then he had become as permanent to me as was the towering white cliff behind me.

"Agnes!" He took me in his arms and kissed me. "You are late."

"Here is your food," I said.

He took it, but he did not seem as ravenous as usual. "Why? Why are you late?" He had to shout to make himself heard, because of the noise of the sea.

"Eat!" I urged.

He realized what he was holding, and ate with pleasure, but something was still on his mind. "When you did not come, I was afraid."

"Why?"

"I thought something might have happened."

"What sort of thing?"

"The police."

"Never mind the police. They will not come again, and if they do, they will not find you. They will never find you here." I spoke confidently, to reassure him, and I was anxious to reassure him, because it seemed to me that something desperate had been done because of him. My mind was clouded just then, and I wanted it to be so, for I felt that if I tried too hard I should remember something it was better to forget. I wanted to keep my mind clouded, and watch those white horses galloping towards us and never reaching us, and I wanted to have Scarecrow love me.

But it would not work out as I wished it, for when Scarecrow asked, "What have you been doing today?" I replied, without even thinking, "I have killed my father."

CHAPTER 20

Scarecrow drew me back into the cave, right against the wall of it, where, if each put the lips close to the other's ear, we could talk without raising our voices.

"Say that again, Agnes. I don't believe I heard you properly."

"I have killed my father."

"No, you don't mean it. You are imagining things. Please don't tease me!"

"I shot him," I said.

Scarecrow started to get to his feet. "He may not be dead. I must go and see what I can do."

I pulled him back. "My father is quite dead. He has no face, and I—know what—brains—look—like—now." At these words a horrible nausea rose in me and I clung to

Scarecrow, shuddering and swallowing the bile which came into my mouth.

He held me gently, and rocked me as if I had been a baby. "There, Agnes! There, there!" But he wanted to know what had happened, even if it did make me sick. "Why did you do it? Why on earth?"

"I don't know."

"You must! You must think! It's terribly important."

I tried, just to please him, but nothing came. "How can I tell why I killed him, when I did not know I was going to do it?"

"You mean you picked up the gun on an impulse?"

"I picked it up because he was chasing me."

"Why was he chasing you?"

"To catch me."

"What was he going to do when he caught you?"

"I don't know. He didn't say."

"Then why were you running away?"

It struck me that Scarecrow was behaving very like a detective. "I always run away from my father when he chases me," I said, impatiently. "Don't keep asking questions."

Scarecrow made a sound which was something like a groan. "I've got to make you understand. This is something terrible you have done, Agnes."

"No worse than what you did," I told him, quickly.

He was silent for a moment or two, as though my reply had confused him, then he said, "What I did was different."

"Yes. You killed a different person. But you killed somebody, didn't you?"

"I did," he admitted, and there was a great sadness in his voice. "I'm not judging you, Agnes. I've no right to. I only want to help you. Tell me, had your father been beating you?"

"No. He gave up beating me, because he was afraid they would be cross with him when they saw the bruises."

"They?"

"The people who were coming to take me away and shut me up."

"Oh! What made you think he was planning such a thing?"

"I heard him talking with my sister Nellie. They arranged it all."

"Why didn't you tell me about it?"

"I did not want to bother you."

"If only you had told me, I might have prevented this."

"But I didn't kill him because he was going to put me away."

"No?"

"No. There was you, too."

"Me?"

"Tonight he found me in the larder getting some food. He guessed who it was for, and he tried to make me tell him where you were. He was coming to shoot you."

Scarecrow took his arms from around me, and buried his face in his hands. "Oh, God! As if one were not enough! How many must I kill before I've finished?"

"You didn't kill my father," I reminded him. "I did."

"But I was responsible. You did it for me. It's just as if I had held the gun."

"No." I shook my head with certainty. "I did not kill my father for you."

"Then why did you?"

It was more difficult to explain which were my reasons than which were not. "He was wicked," I said, at last. "Always he was cruel to everybody, and cruelty is the wickedest thing of all. He was cruel to my mother and to my sisters and brothers and to me. Nellie has forgotten, or she wouldn't want to come back and live with him. Or do you think she felt she was safe because she was grown up and married?"

"I don't know."

"People are never safe. My father thought he was, and look what happened! Do you know why he was cruel?"

"No."

"He was cruel because he hated everybody and everything. He hated human beings and animals. He even hated the grass and the corn he grew, and the grass and the corn and the animals knew, and hated him back. You wouldn't think grass could hate, but it can, and it used to try to harm him, putting a tussock of knots and tangles in the way of his feet. Even the tools he worked with hated him, and would cut his hands when they could. That is why I killed him, only I didn't kill him really."

"But you said—"

"The gun killed him. It wanted to. But guns can't go off by themselves, so it made me do it. Truly, Scarecrow, it is dreadful for me to kill anything. I could not wring the necks of the

chickens when we needed them for food. I could not even trample on a spider. So how could I kill my father?"

"I think I understand," Scarecrow said, slowly. "Poor Agnes! I should have gone away and left you in peace. It was too heavy a burden I put on you. You are not meant for carrying burdens. You should be free and untroubled, with nothing heavier on your shoulders than sea spray or moonlight. You don't need anything but the birds and the flowers."

"And you."

"No, not me. I am bad for you."

I stroked his forehead, where the black hair and the white skin met like night and day. "Oh, Scarecrow, you are the loveliest thing that ever came to me. I used to think spring was best of all, but you are better than spring."

He sighed, and went on talking as if to himself. "I understand so well, the motive and the impulse. But what sort of a story will it sound to the police?"

"The police?" I echoed, astonished.

He gave a short, unamused laugh. "You didn't think you would be able to keep them out of this, did you?"

"Of course! We kept them away from you, and this is easier, because my father cannot tell them."

"But he'll be missed."

"Not tonight. Nor tomorrow."

"I'm talking of the future."

"Then don't talk of the future. Let's forget it. Do you know what the future is, Scarecrow? I do. I've often thought about it, in my bedroom where it is easy to think. The future is something that has not happened, and when a thing has not happened, it *isn't*. So you are talking about nothing."

"Nevertheless that nothing is going to catch up with us and turn into an unpleasant reality. I'd take you with me if I could, dear, but there's not the ghost of a chance for two of us. It would only cause you extra suffering."

Again I was surprised. Scarecrow kept surprising me that night. "Take me with you? But we are not going away. I shall stay on the farm."

"Yes. Yes, perhaps that is wise. You can wait for them there."

This time I knew whom he meant. "There is nothing to wait for except the winter, and that will be warm and cosy. You

have cut up a high stack of wood, and there will be many potatoes when they are dug. We shall sit by our fire and you shall tell me stories. Do you know the one about the princess who slept a hundred years, and the prince who kissed her and woke her? This is our story. Come, let us go home."

I crawled out of the cave and stood up, and Scarecrow followed me. The night had grown wilder, and in the air were the needle-sharp points of mingled rain and spray. I was longing to hurry back to the shelter of the farm, and I was not even afraid of the thing that lay on the kitchen floor. Scarecrow would deal with that. But when I held out my hand he did not take it, and hung back, muttering something.

I stood close to him, breast to breast, because that was the only way to hear. "What did you say?"

"You don't expect me to come back with you?"

I stared at him, though in the darkness his face was no more than a white patch with black hollows for eyes.

"It wouldn't do, Agnes," he went on. "Don't you see? We've both worked so hard for my freedom. We've paid so high a price for it, and what is the use of buying something expensive and then throwing it away? It's extravagant. If I come back with you it's only a matter of time before they get me."

"You are talking about the future again," I accused him.

"What if I am?"

"There isn't any future for us."

"You're dead right there."

"For us it will always be Now. Don't be afraid, Scarecrow. I am not afraid. Come back and be safe."

"I can't."

"But you can. Only yourself is stopping you."

"If I could do any good," he said, miserably, "I'd come. But nothing I do will make any difference. In fact, it would look worse if I were found there. So why should I get mixed up with anything else?"

"I did not desert you," I reminded him. "Please don't desert me!"

"Oh, I know I'm a scoundrel," Scarecrow said, sullenly, "but I love life, and there isn't any life without freedom. You don't know what you are asking me to do."

I could feel how he had hardened his heart against me, and

I could realize the obstinacy of him, even as we shouted to one another and the wind whipped the words off our lips.

"Very well," I gave up. "We will not go back."

Instantly he was alarmed. "You must."

"Not without you."

"But you can't stay here."

"If you can, I can."

"Who do you think will feed us?" he asked, sarcastically. "Mermaids?"

"There will be no food."

"So you would rather starve than leave me?"

"Yes. I would."

He was lashing himself into a fury, just as the sea was doing. He was trying to hurt me, just as the sea would do if the beach had not fenced her in. But he would not succeed in hurting me, any more than the sea would, because I had no pride. To have pride is no more sensible than sitting on a hedgehog.

"But I shan't stay here," he went on, using his words as if they were a sword. "I am going away."

"I shall come with you."

"That would be delightful! That would just about add the finishing touch."

"Still I shall come," I said, calmly.

"You won't! I won't have you!" He was like a child now, hammering his bricks upon the floor, and angry because neither the bricks nor the floor would break. "I shall walk away from you."

"I can walk as fast as you can."

"I shall creep away while you are asleep."

I smiled. "Even in my sleep I should know if you were going. But if you did manage to trick me—"

"Yes? What would you do then?"

"I should walk into the sea."

"You're mad!" He said it crossly, but not nastily, as my father would have done, and I knew by the way he said it that he did not really think I was mad. It was as he might have said it to anyone with whom he was angry, to even the cleverest person, and so I took it as a compliment, and was pleased.

"Well, if you're going to be so pigheaded," he shouted, "we might as well go and sit in the cave. I'm getting wet."

I do not know how long we sat there without speaking. I was not worried, for he was beside me, and I like to sit doing nothing. But I could tell he was restless, for I could hear him picking up pebbles, weighing them in the palm of his hand, and then dropping them again.

At last he touched my knee. "You win, Agnes."

"What do you mean?" I did not understand, for we had been playing no game.

"I'll come back with you. I reckon I knew I had to, right from the start, but I tried to beat the book. It's pretty galling to see your plans spoilt by the one chance you hadn't included."

I was so happy that I could not keep still, but went ahead of Scarecrow, running and dancing. I opened my mouth to drink the rain, and I tried to catch it in my hands. This was like all my dreams coming true at once, all the pictures I had seen in the clouds, all the music I had heard on the wind. Scarecrow, behind me, was leaden-footed, but I thought it was only because of his heavy boots.

The farm was the same as I had left it, with my lamp still burning in the kitchen. I showed Scarecrow my father, and I did not shudder, for I was now used to seeing him lying there on the floor, and the unfortunate accident which had happened to him was over and done with.

It was Scarecrow who said, "I must bury him."

I agreed. Naturally dead people were buried, and we would do the same with him, but it would have to be a small funeral, with just the two of us. "Tomorrow, perhaps," I said.

"No. Tonight."

"Tonight? But it is dark and wet."

"All the better. I wonder where I should put him."

That was not easy to decide. "Not in the vegetable garden, nor in the fields which are ploughed. The wood is quiet and peaceful. No one will disturb him there."

Scarecrow shook his head. "That's the first place where they'll look."

It was a more difficult problem than I had expected, and I found myself wishing we could take him to the cemetery to be beside my mother. Not that I believed my mother would welcome him overmuch, but it was fitting that husband and wife should be as close bodily in death as they were in life. What their spirits did was another matter.

I took my mind off the cemetery and brought it nearer home. "There is a piece of soft ground at the edge of the rhubarb patch, if you think it is not disrespectful."

"This is no time for respect," Scarecrow said, harshly.

"No. And we have no holy ground on the farm."

"Holy or not, near or far, hidden or exposed, it will make no difference. They'll find it, if they have to dig over every inch of the land." And Scarecrow made his preparations, fetching two sacks for covering my father's head, and a spade for making the grave.

I offered to go with him to hold a lantern, but he was afraid someone might see the light, so I stayed behind and scrubbed the kitchen floor. It was fresh and spotless when Scarecrow returned, and there was tea made and waiting for him, and the hearth was swept and the fire lively and red.

He threw himself into a chair as though he were exhausted, but as I poured the steaming tea into a cup for him, I felt as if I should never be tired again. It was almost too wonderful to think that now he would have hot meals, the comforts of a house, the protection of a roof. He would have a real table, real chairs, a real bed.

Realizing that, I held out my arms to him. "Let us go to bed."

He turned his face towards the window, and I noticed how he had changed since last I saw him by any light more powerful than the moon. His eyes were red-rimmed, his face hollow, and cheeks and chin were adorned with a young, straggling beard. "But dawn is coming," he said.

"So it is." I went to the window and opened it, and all the lovely, sharp scents came crowding in. The rain had stopped, and the wind had gone away high in the sky to the west, where it was twisting the tails of the clouds and chasing them out of sight. Away and below us the sea was still grumbling, but in the east was being born a day of gentle, smiling grace. You could tell it by the babyish pink and blue of the sky, and by the cleanness of the air, which looked as freshly scrubbed as my kitchen floor, and by the eager anticipation of the grasses and the trees.

"Let us go to bed," I repeated.

Scarecrow yawned. "We can't. There are the cows to milk."

"Oh, I forgot. Well, we will milk them, and then we will go to bed."

And so we did. Scarecrow opened the door of the room he had used, but I shook my head and led him up the next flight of stairs. I was shy when I took him into my bedroom, for it was like introducing two people you love who are strangers to one another. You hope they will like each other, for only by having harmony together can they have harmony with you. But I need not have worried. Scarecrow belonged to this room, for here I had conceived that scarecrow which had helped him to freedom.

Most of that day we slept, but once I awoke to feel something on my eyelids, and found it to be Scarecrow's mouth. He was leaning over me as I opened my eyes.

"Agnes," he said.

"Yes?" I murmured, drowsily.

"Agnes," he said. "Agnes, I love you, God help me!"

They were the words I had longed to hear, and a wave of happiness flowed over me, penetrating every corner of my body, to my toes and my fingertips. I did not understand why he added, "God help me!" but perhaps God has to help us to love.

CHAPTER 21

I do not know how long we remained here, the two of us, alone. Day merged into day so smoothly, so gracefully, that there seemed no difference between one day and the next. It was exactly as I had told Scarecrow it would be. There was no future for us. Time was caught and imprisoned in an unchanging Now. I did not even consider when or how it might end, for Now filled all the earth and the sky for me, and I was content. But Scarecrow was not made as I was. In his eyes was always the apprehension of what might come, though he was happy enough, and his face filled out and he became sleeker and golden in the sunshine, and he was as ready as I was to laugh, and to make love, too.

Yet we were not idle. The farm had to be tended, for earth takes no notice of the people who come and go. They are her servants, and if one dies, then another takes his place. Be-

tween us we harvested the corn and dug the potatoes, and Scarecrow planned to plough the fields and sow the winter wheat. There was apple picking, as well, and I loved to be at the top of the ladder, in a secret world among the leaves, cupping my hands round the green or blushing fruit. Yes, it was a busy time, a time of ripeness and rightness, a time which paid over and over again for the sad, barren years.

While this was going on, the season changed. The autumn trees flamed with rapture, blackberries purpled, and while we lay close and warm in our bed, the owls cried up and down the valley with the voice of pain.

Then the postman came, and I knew, as soon as I took the letter, that Now was preparing to fly away, and however desperately I hung on to it, it would go, and the future, the cold, unknown, frightening future would come seeping in.

The letter, addressed to my father, was from Nellie, and after I had read it I showed it to Scarecrow.

"Why haven't I heard from you?" Nellie wrote. "You promised to let me know in a month and now it is nearly two months. I have waited and waited, and Fred hasn't bothered about looking for a job, because it wasn't worth it. We simply don't know where to turn for money, and it's not fair to keep us dangling like this. I'll give you another week, and if I haven't heard by then, we are coming to the farm whether you've got rid of her or not."

"This is it," Scarecrow said, and I did not reply, because there was no need to. This was it.

I changed, then, and took notice of time, counting the days, counting the hours and the very minutes. It was such a small ration we had left, and such a precious one. Without discussing it, we both instinctively ceased work, except for looking after the animals. To cultivate the fields is to presume the kindness of the future. It is a statement of faith, a testimony to security and permanence, and those things we had not. So we made holiday, roaming the countryside, but keeping away from roads or houses where we might be seen. We explored the seashore, going further than I had ever been, and finding how solitary and deserted are those beaches of England which are not used for pleasure. For thousands of years they have heard nothing but the pounding of the sea and the cries of the sea birds, and there is a more ancient look about them than about the oldest churches and castles.

We went inland, too, to where the real trees are, and walked through the fairyland of the beech woods, where it was gold above and below, and it seemed we breathed very gold. We were not sad, because to be sad would have spoilt the last few glorious morsels of Now, but at night when we loved there was something desperate and urgent between us, as though we strove to attain a more than human union, a union which time could not destroy.

At the end of the fifth day, when we sat before the fire, Scarecrow said, "I have decided."

My heart sank, because I had known this must come, but I had hoped to put it off a little longer. So I asked, "Can't we leave it until tomorrow?"

He shook his head. "Tonight is for talking, tomorrow for action. Your sister comes the day after."

I accepted it then and I leaned over and kissed him gently on the cheek. It was the first of our good-bys. "What are you going to do?"

He squared his shoulders, already bracing himself. "In the morning I shall walk to town, and go to the police."

I stared at him. Somehow I had not expected this. "Why, Scarecrow? For so long you have tried to escape them."

"Yes, and we fear that which we try to escape. By going to meet it we cease to fear. Besides, I have learnt a great deal since I became a scarecrow, and I have found something I thought I had lost for ever."

"What is that?"

"Love."

"Love," I repeated, softly. Then suddenly I was dreadfully afraid, and in a panic I threw myself into Scarecrow's arms. "Oh, Scarecrow, is it true that waters cannot quench love, nor fire consume it?"

"Yes. It's true, Agnes."

"Are you sure? Does it cast out fear? Is it stronger than death? Oh, promise me that it is!"

"I promise you."

He seemed so confident that I was a little comforted, and rested my head against his shoulder and asked, "Must you go? My father said that if they caught you they would hang you."

Scarecrow stared into the fire, and I could tell he was seeing the past again. "This was a mercy killing, so they had

mercy on me, and shut me away out of the sunshine, and that was worse than death."

"What is a mercy killing?"

"It is when you love someone very much and you help her to die a little quicker, because she cannot bear her pain and you cannot bear it, and she begs you for peace, and you can't deny her that."

A pang went through me like the stab of a sword. It was so real, so physical, that I thought at first I must have eaten something bad, and then I realized what it was, and asked, "Who was she?"

"My wife," Scarecrow replied.

We were both silent, he with his thoughts, and I with my writhing jealousy. When I could bear it no longer, I accused him, "You said you loved me."

"I do."

"But you loved her."

"Yes, I did."

"I don't want you to love anyone but me."

"I don't. I shall never love anyone else."

"But you did."

"What I gave her has not robbed you. Besides, didn't you yourself say that the past has gone and the future not come, therefore neither exists?"

"I suppose so," I allowed, sulkily. "But your past hasn't gone if you can still remember it. I don't want you to. I don't want you to have any memories I cannot share."

"What about you? You have your memories. Yes, and your loves. Am I jealous of your love for the trees and the flowers? Yes, and you do love them. You love everything that grows. I have seen you look with adoration at a cabbage."

I could not help laughing at this, but I was not consoled. "I shall never know which of us you loved best."

"Does that matter?"

"Yes. Oh, Scarecrow, how can I be truly sure you love me at all?"

"I shall prove it to you."

"How?"

"Tomorrow I shall go to the police and tell them I killed your father."

"But you didn't."

"That doesn't matter. I shall do it for you, and you will know that there is nothing I would not do for you. And I

shall do it for myself, because it will make me happy to know you'll not suffer for something you did not mean to do, something for which you are not really to blame."

"It would be a big lie to tell."

"Some lies are worth the telling, and sometimes we must do what looks like evil, so that good will come out of it."

"It is not right to let you be blamed for me."

"Isn't it right to make me happy?"

"Yes."

"Then this will make me happy."

There was much to digest in this conversation, and I sat thinking until another aspect of it occurred to me. "When you tell them, they will not let you come back to me, will they?"

"No."

"I don't think I can bear it if they keep us apart."

"They would do that, anyway. They would come and discover what has happened, and take us and lock us both up. I don't think that would be good for you, Agnes. I think it would harm you."

"But they will not consider it a mercy to kill my father."

"They didn't know your father."

"And so for that they will hang you."

"Don't think about it, Agnes. Everything will be done according to the law, and we know little of the law."

"What shall I do?"

"Stay here quietly. They will come and question you, but do not worry. Answer them politely, without saying much. If you are in doubt, simply tell them you don't know."

An overwhelming desolation swept through me, yet I could argue no more. Whatever we did, the end would be the same, and so it was best to let Scarecrow have his way. If he wanted it like that, it must be so.

That night we lay in an enchantment of love and sorrow. The hunter's moon, sinking, was like a large golden platter outside our window. By its light we could see one another's faces, and we were as though we were already dead.

Once Scarecrow said, "Set up the scarecrow again in the spring. I like to think he is protecting you as well as the wheat." And another time he said, "They say life has a pattern, but you can't expect to see a pattern until it is finished, can you?"

We did not sleep, because that would have been a waste,

and the worst moment for me was when I heard the cock crow. To most of those who listened, it meant the beginning of a new day, but to us it was the end.

We got up and milked the cows, and while I prepared breakfast Scarecrow carried in a pile of logs so that I should have plenty of fuel for the fire. Then we sat down to eat, but we made a poor job of it, and Scarecrow tried to cover up by drinking several large cups of tea.

Afterwards he insisted on helping me clear the table and wash the crockery. It looked so strange that I could not help laughing. I had never seen a man do such things before. Most farmers are too busy to bother themselves with household tasks, as long as there is a woman about the place.

But at last it was over. It was no use pretending. Now had vanished, and the future was upon us.

I walked to the gate with Scarecrow, and looked down the track which led to the lane which led to the main road. In my mind I could see every inch of that road as it led to town, and soon I should have to picture Scarecrow on it, and it would be the only thing linking him to me.

We stopped and looked at one another, and suddenly we had nothing to say. He stood there, empty-handed, with no possessions but the clothes he wore, and they were the trousers from my father's wedding suit, and an old shirt of my brother's which I had patched. He was going with nothing, and he had come with nothing, but he had brought me the greatest treasure in the world.

Neither of us was good at saying good-by. Scarecrow did not touch me, and I knew it was because it would have weakened his resolve. He looked at me, and in his eyes was all the poetry I had found in my mother's books. On his lips trembled the loveliest words women have known, the sounds of romance and everlasting love. But all he said was, "It's been nice knowing you."

THE END

When I had finished writing down what had happened, I did as I had planned. I put on a coat and went out. But first I saw that the fire was safe, and I turned out the lamp, so as not to waste oil. Everything was clean and tidy, ready for Nellie's coming.

The wind rained blows on me as soon as I got outside, and I was glad, because you cannot think when you are fighting a gale, and I did not want to think. But I was not afraid. Fear and hope go hand-in-hand, and when hope dies, fear dies, too.

It was a struggle to walk, and I envied the trees and the grass, who merely had to stand and endure, with flying hair and feet firmly rooted in the soil. The track was soft and muddy, and seemed endlessly long. It was almost impossible to remember it carpeted with warm white dust, and its bare sides dressed in hawthorn and sloe and the prickly gold of gorse. Where were the butterflies, who used to weave their patterns above this path, and the wild bees, and the grasshoppers and the ants? Were they all dead, or had they found a cranny into which they could creep and ride out the storm and the cold?

In the old sunken track it was almost calm, and I stopped for a moment. There, on the left, was the field where my scarecrow had stood, and beyond it the brave little wood. Here, almost at this very spot, I had met the policemen hunting a man I had never seen. If only I could go back to that time, could go back and play my part more sensibly, more worthily! Slowly I moved on. What use lingering? The place was empty. There was no scarecrow, and not even the ghost of a policeman.

As I came out on to the open cliff, the wind hit me viciously, taking my breath away. I half turned from it, bending my head. To walk to the edge would be an almost superhuman feat. Must I then crawl on all fours to my death? Or go backwards, so that I could breathe? Or wriggle

like a worm? Or perhaps postpone it until morning? These fantastic ideas made me laugh. I wished Scarecrow were with me to share the joke.

And then I felt it. It was not much. I prepared to dismiss it, thinking I was mistaken. But it came again. It was as gentle as the touch of passing wings. It was very like the flutter of wind in the stomach. But I knew, without doubt I knew the second time, that it was the first feeble movement of new life.

Transfixed, I stood there, thinking of my body, trying to remember whether there had been other signs. What a fool I was! I should have known before, accustomed as I was to the animals on the farm, and to the ways of the wild creatures. But my mind had been like a saturated sponge, heavy with the burden of love and grief and hatred and fear and violence, and so had no thought to spare for the vagaries of my body.

Without a glance at the cliff edge I walked back down the old path, and across the lane, and up the track to our farmyard, the wind helping me at every step. I took off my damp coat, and lighted the lamp, and put more wood on the fire.

My cheeks were burning and I was tingling all over. Never had I felt more serene, more clearheaded, more whole. I was like someone who had had an illness and had recovered. My baby had saved my life, but it had done more than that. It had made me a complete person, added the other half to my wits. I could be confident now, because I had within me Scarecrow's gentleness and sanity. I had responsibility, too, for I had been entrusted to carry valuable cargo, and must move with circumspection.

I lighted a candle and went up to the room Scarecrow had used, and stood looking at the bed, remembering him. Above it was the text, "God Watcheth," but it did not frighten me. "It's all right," I said. "You can watch now. I shall not do anything else to be ashamed of."

Then I went out and continued up the stairs to my bedroom. I had not entered it since morning, not since Scarecrow left, and the sight and feeling of it startled me, for that room received me with love. It put its arms round me as if it were Scarecrow himself. Nothing had been wasted of the love and happiness we had created there. The room was a casket overflowing with treasures.

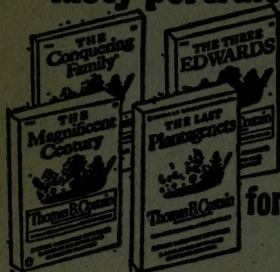
I held out my arms, and hugged myself because there was no one else to hug. It was all so wonderfully simple. As soon as daylight came I would go to the police and tell them the truth. No longer was it right or necessary for Scarecrow to bear my burden. I myself was strong enough. How could I have considered for a moment letting him suffer for me? What! Allow Scarecrow to hang? Let him be put to death before he saw his child? Impossible! Ridiculous!

I was not troubled by apprehension as to what they might do to me. No doubt the punishment would be proper. At the best they would lock me up, but nature would unlock our child, and give it the freedom of the world. And perhaps one day, in the future which had taken charge of us, we should be together again.

I brushed my hair until it shone, and I searched my chest-of-drawers until, stuck at the back, I found an old hat, for I must arrive at the police station with the dignity fitting to the occasion. Then I sat down by the window and waited for the cock to crow.

YOU ARE MERRILY INVITED

to enjoy a great storyteller's lusty portrait of Historic England



**4 Thrilling Bestsellers by
THOMAS B. COSTAIN
a \$23 hard-cover value
for only \$2.95...If you act now!**

① The Conquering Family

Unforgettable drama of the men and women of one powerful family who sought to sweep the whole world before them. 352 pgs. "Fascinating", N.Y. Times

② The Magnificent Century

Costain superbly and vigorously recreates the huge, turbulent and passionate era of Henry III. 383 pgs. "Magnificent", N.Y. Herald Tribune.

③ The Three Edwards

Fascinating saga of three unforgettable men and the strong-willed woman who destroyed one and sought to enslave another. 480 pgs. "Exciting", Christian Science Monitor.

④ The Last Plantagenets

History's most spectacular Kings and Queens come to life, plus a brilliant new probing of the greatest mystery of all time. 447 pgs. "Stirring", San Francisco Examiner.

**Mail Coupon Right Away
for all Four Books!**

—FREE TRIAL OFFER—

Popular Library, Dept. 60-2140
355 Lexington Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10017

Send me postpaid the complete and magnificent set of paperback books by Thomas B. Costain: Pageant of Plantagenet England in four thrilling volumes, boxed. I'm enclosing \$2.95, and, if not fully satisfied, I may return the books in good condition within 10 days for a full refund.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip # _____

A NEVER-TO-BE FORGOTTEN NOVEL —AND MOTION PICTURE— OF A YOUNG GIRL'S AWAKENING TO PASSIONATE LOVE...

THE GIRL had grown up knowing no love, no comfort. At this moment she felt her loneliness as never before...

THE MAN was a fugitive, driven from all human contact by a desperate act of violence...

The coming-together of these two was an explosion—a sudden burst of light in the darkness...

"BRILLIANT...IMPOSSIBLE TO PUT DOWN"

—San Francisco Chronicle

Winner of the Grand Prix Feminin du Cinema International
The memorable novel that became a hit International Classics film
starring Melvyn Douglas • Patricia Gozzi
Dean Stockwell • Gunnel Lindblom

Produced by ... Directed by John Guillermin

Internet Archive
Rapture
ISBN: B000K1UNTC
UsedGood

2012-09-08
E1236C3

1

P O P U

